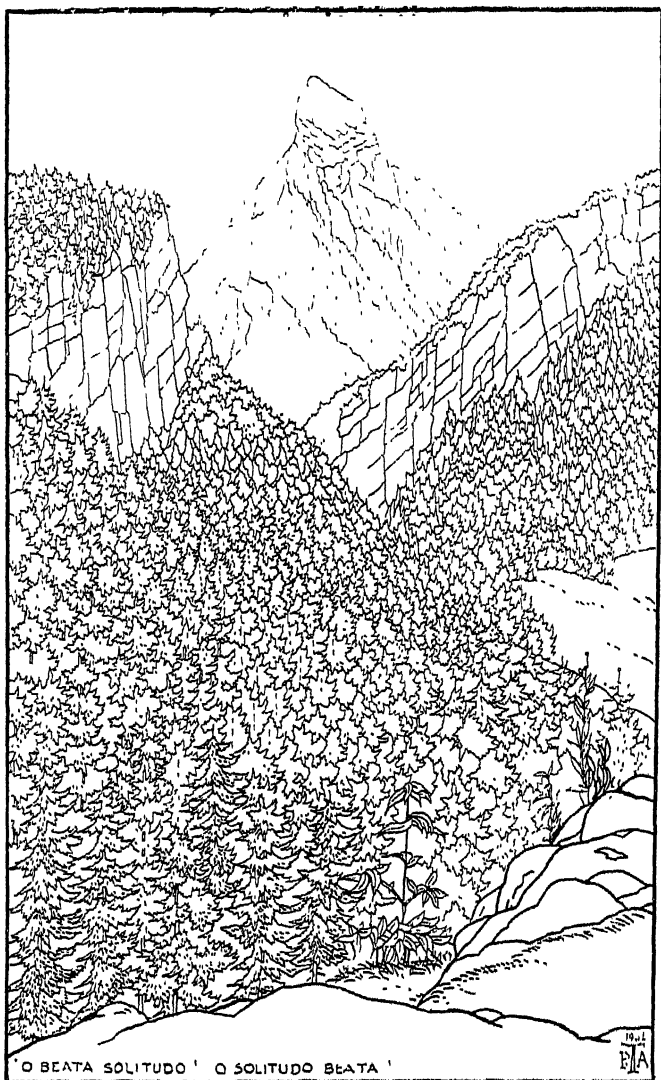


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IN THE "DESERT" OF THE GRANDE CHARTREUSE

THE QUEST OF SOLITUDE

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY
PETER F. ANSON

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NOTE.—All the illustrations of hermits and anchorites are adapted from the eighteenth-century drawings in Helyot's *Histoire des ordres monastiques, religieux et militaires* (Paris, 1714-19), reissued in Migne's *Encyclopédie théologique*, xx-xxiv (Paris, 1858).

INTRODUCTION

DIFFERENT people of many sorts, we expect, will pick up this book drawn by its title, *The Quest of Solitude*. No sooner read than they felt an answering chord somewhere deep down, and they will open its pages as one pushes open the gate of a well-loved garden. They are people who go in quest of solitude. If their purse can afford it, there is that little week-end cottage just within easy reach of town where, for a day and a half, they can forget all that clatter of things and chatter of persons that frets their nerves for the other five days of the week. Oh! the ecstasy of the feeling as tram lines stop abruptly at their terminus, and you leave the last house behind you, and the car purrs down the open road, away, away into the solitude of the country. Less fortunate brethren who sit at desks all the year round, save for three golden weeks in summer, and write, and write, interminably; feeling not so much a cog in a machine as a drop of lubricant, a bit of grease that helps it to run smoothly; how they too are saved from utter withering of the spirit by the memory of that spot—some almost unknown bay in Cornwall, it may be—where they passed those weeks last year, and where they are going again, stealthily, wellnigh, lest the spell of its solitude be broken:

. . . a wee bay wild wi' breezes
Where the rocks are dark and steep,
Where sweepin' gulls go callin'
An' the sca can never sleep. . . .

the solitude of the sea! And now, to find that all these old saints, monks, and hermits were feeling just the same things as ourselves, and doing just the same thing, all those centuries ago! Why, it turns the week-end cottage into a holy shrine; the Cornish express puffing out of Paddington becomes a pilgrim train!

We are sorry to have to shatter a pleasant illusion, to awake you to reality out of a rosy dream; but the difference between such seekers after solitude and those described in this book is fundamental. To put it as shortly as possible: the people we have just been supposing—you—if you will allow us to be personal, in seeking solitude, are running *away* from something; the folk this book describes were running *after* something—the negative and positive quests of solitude. For it is true, is it not, that when you get down to your old thatched cottage, with its flowers, its little low rooms with their brick floors and leaded casements or, fresh from your journey, you have gone down to your favourite spot among the rocks to watch the evening tide come in, and the salt air has brushed the dust of a year off you, and the music of the waves stilled the rumble of train and motor coach in your tired brain; it is true, is it not, that the sense of peace which invades your whole being is that of having reached the journey's end? You want solitude as a relief from the ordinary tormenting life you have to lead; you want it for what you will *not* find there—noise, crowds, worry; in a word, town life. For you solitude is an end, not a means.

At this point you may decide to skip the rest of this introduction and get on with the book proper. Then, after reading it, you might, very understandably, come

back to me, rather angrily, to say that I had been trying to mislead you. That so many of the saints and others who figure in this book you have found to have been playing just the same game as yourself: the desert, the cave, the hermitage, were to them just as much a means of escape as your week-end cottage or Cornish cove is to you. That you have found them running *away* from lots of things—from cares of state, or high candlesticks in the Church; from positions that were getting out of hand; from wine and women sometimes; or even from the shadow of their own selves. Quite so. But tell me, did they stay in the wilderness, wherever it was, just for three weeks every summer, or turn hermit for occasional week-ends only? I will go all the way with you, and admit that some of them may have begun in this way, as a temporary expedient to throw off the incubus of ordinary life; but the whole point is, that having got away into solitude, they stayed there, most of them for life. And the reason was, that they there found something, whether they began by looking for it or not. They saw something in the far distance and began running after it, or, it came up against them, and the shock of impact changed them wholly. Something? Someone. Evidently a person; clearly someone they could get to know and live with, for it is not good for man to dwell alone; and knowing, learn to love, since man's heart is made for that, and without it he must languish and die. It may be the fashion to talk about "getting into touch with the Infinite," "achieving Reality," "coming to the All," and so on. I prefer the simpler word, the thing that is written in every line of the spiritual experience of the men and women chronicled

here: the Quest of Solitude for these people ended in the Finding of God.

By that I do not mean that they went into solitude pagans, or atheists, or agnostics, and there became believers. They were quite as sure of God's existence as they were of their own before they sought the wilderness. It is unfortunately true, however, that a man may have perfect faith in God, may even know a good deal *about* God, without having much personal acquaintance with Him. That is a thing which depends upon a certain number of conditions, outward and inward, one of which, solitude, is our present concern.

Every one knows that for mental concentration upon a given matter, a certain detachment from competing interests is necessary: you find it impossible to work out an abstruse mathematical problem with the children playing trains in the same room; even with the open score before you, how can you follow the intricate beauties of a Bach fugue if people sitting near you insist on chattering, even in an undertone? We have all had experiences of this kind; "you cannot do two things at once," we say. Now, God is a spirit, and we, spirit and flesh, with the body as anything but a sleeping partner. Indeed, it would fare hardly with us were it so, for we depend for our knowledge of things upon the body's external senses. Even in things of religion, in things of the soul, the door, the window to that interior castle is through the senses—eyes that see what the hand touches, ears that hear what the tongue tells; external revelation, in a word. All the same, God, who uses the instruments He has fashioned, does not limit His approach to us solely to these channels of communication. There is an inward vision, a spiritual

hearing, a "touch" upon the spirit which gives consciousness of God's presence, though such terms are only analogies drawn from sense-life. How earth-bound we all are when we come to this manner of dealing with the spiritual world! How still and small seems the divine voice as it crosses the chasm between eternity and time! Not that it lacks power to make itself heard, but that there are so many other more familiar sounds to drown it out. You may remember how, after the disaster to General Nobile's airship, and the survivors lay out on the Polar ice tapping out their S O S on the portable wireless set, that Heaven, surely, had thrown down at their feet, the signals could not be heard aboard the parent ship at Svalbard unless every noise there were stilled; even the low hum of a running dynamo far below deck made reception impossible. The privacy of the chamber and the shut door are not merely precautions against vainglory in one seeking God's face in prayer, but a necessary tranquillity for him to hear the answering voice. This is the fundamental reason of the quest of solitude; absence of worry, silence, a certain leisure even, are indispensable in greater or lesser degree for intimate communication with God.

I know this may seem quite outlandish to many people; unhealthy "mysticism" (the word was bound to occur here at least once), drawing folk away from real and earnest life, substituting a dream for the business of existence—well, there it is. Are you going to condemn men and women of every rank of life, of all countries and times known to history, who have followed the quest of solitude, and found something so satisfying there that the world knew them no

more? I appeal to the witness of their lives as here told. And lest theirs should seem tainted evidence to a writer who, himself unable to gauge their reward, was clear-sighted enough to see after what it is solitaries strive. Says Ruskin: "During the whole of the fourth century multitudes of self-devoted men led lives of extreme misery and poverty in the effort to obtain some closer knowledge of the Being and Will of God. We know, in any available clearness, neither what they suffered, nor what they learned. . . . And only God knows how far their prayers were heard. This only we may observe with reverence, that among all their numbers, none seem to have repented their chosen manner of existence; . . . and the hours of dream or meditation, on mountain or in cave, appear seldom to have dragged so heavily as those which, without either vision or reflection, we pass ourselves, on the embankment or in the tunnel." ¹ What then? Is the whole of mankind to troop off into the wilderness and leave the world to look after itself? We are suggesting no such thing; nor, to tell the truth, is a universal abandonment of a workaday world in the least likely to take place. Do not let the various drawings in this book beguile you into thinking that solitude must be naturally rather desirable. The hermitage among pine-woods, a cell in some mountain cloister have their natural charms, no doubt—at Camaldoli and Vallombrosa quite nice summer hotels have been fashioned out of the monastic buildings; the Grande Chartreuse is becoming more popular every year as a centre for winter sports—and Ruskin was perhaps unduly deepening the shadows when he wrote of "extreme

¹ *Bible of Amiens*, III, sect. 30.

misery" as being the solitaries' lot. Judged by modern standards of comfort, or even of necessity, their method of life would be reckoned almost inhuman. All the same, it is wonderful to what the human frame can accustom itself when put to it; the trenches showed that, and you can read here something of Charles de Foucauld's life in the Sahara, turned hermit from being cultured Parisian. Hard, almost savage in cases, as individual solitary's lives may have been, it is not so much the physical side of their observances that makes the wilderness a place of suffering and changes the hermit's garden into a Garden of Gethsemane, often enough.

When the great resolution has been taken, to leave all and go in search of God in solitude, there comes that first-hour zest which attends all new undertakings begun with good will. That lasts as long as it ought to last; more shortly for big souls, longer for the lesser—it is the jam to get the powder down. Then begins the first revelation, and a very unpleasant one it is. The solitary begins to see himself as he really is. The meanness, the crookedness of natural character begins to stand out in a strong light; those wounds that disobedience to conscience in the past has left festering, now give forth their poisoned matter. There may be terrible uprisings of lower nature, and, more formidable yet, resistance of self-will to the strait-jacket into which he would thrust it. Here you get the reason for what look like eccentricities of asceticism, its bread-and-water fasts, scourges, and the rest, even to midnight immersions practised by Celtic solitaries. It is Master Soul, the rider, whipping Brother Ass, the body, into obedience. This stage may last

months or years; how long, no one can foretell; but while it lasts, solitude is full of strife and pain.

If the sunlight is to pass through them, window panes must be thoroughly scoured, an old spiritual writer says. What he means is that when the purgation, as it is called, of the external senses has been accomplished, the warm beams of God's loving presence can pour themselves freely into the chastened soul. Now it is that the natural charms of the solitudes described and depicted in this book blend marvellously with the new spiritual experience; it is the soul's honeymoon, to adopt the classical language, describing the relations between the human soul and God, its lover. In its turn this wanes too, and the solitary seems to be left alone to a struggle more fundamental than that he began with. If he is not mightily courageous now, it is more than likely that he will turn tail and solitude know him no more. There will be periods of respite; but on and off this state of trial will last a year, five years, twenty . . . who knows? Then the sun shines again, now with equatorial splendour, right overhead, to be followed again by a night as equatorially swift in its falling, and as dark as death. Darker, indeed, for death is the gate of life, while now the solitary can convince himself of only one thing, namely, that since he still exists, God has not utterly cast him off; Omnipotence keeps him from falling into the void of nothingness, though that is but cold comfort amid the encircling gloom of a starless, black night. . . .

The soul's journey towards union with God, Who is Light, does not end there, we need hardly say, nor the solitary life issue in final despair. But that much will be enough for to-day, in order to stammer out some of

the inexpressible woes that must befall a man in his quest of solitude and dwelling therein. To some it will be a notice not to trespass, to others an invitation to dare. Proof of our statements we offer none. Pudding must be eaten before you can know its taste and quality. You would need to practise the solitary life for some good stretch of time before it yielded up any of its secrets to you. True, a student will be able to find out a good deal *about* the matter from writings solitaries have left us. Readers of this book are given a greater chance than ever before of visualizing the solitary life, and, in imagination at least, coming into closer contact with it and its message to mankind. That sturdy Britisher, Dr. Johnson, declared that he felt inclined to kneel and kiss the ground that hermits had trodden of old. Without trying to follow to the letter the Doctor's bulky genuflexions, there must be many, very many we believe, to whom these pages will say deep things. In the midst of a material civilization visibly crumbling away before us, the vision of men and women going apart into solitude—for the quest still goes on—silently, yet stridently bears witness to the reality of the unseen, to the lordship of mind over matter, to the supremacy in man of the spirit. It trumpets abroad the tremendous question: What exchange shall a man give for his soul?

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P. F. A.

CHAPTER I

PRE-CHRISTIAN AND EARLY CHRISTIAN SOLITARIES IN THE EAST

AN innate craving for solitude is a not uncommon symptom among mankind in general, despite the fact that man is commonly supposed to be a "social animal." It manifests itself in all ages, in all religions, and in all races.

The followers of Christ have no monopoly of this quest of solitude, or even of its attainment. Indeed, it is not a product of Christian teaching, being an entirely human instinct, though naturally enough, the differing mental outlook of East and West has coloured its interpretations.

This book is an attempt to show, in what can be no more than a superficial manner, how this curious, yet normal, human instinct has found expression in Christianity, more particularly in Europe, for it would require more than one volume to deal adequately with the East. It is the story of men and women who have deliberately sought "loneliness," who have realized that for them the only lasting happiness and peace of mind were to be found in isolating themselves from the society of their fellow human beings.

Where do we find the first traces of the manifestation of this deeply-implanted instinct appearing in the history of religion? It is difficult to say with any certitude. The accounts given in the Old Testament

concerning the lives of the prophets do not definitely state that they lived as solitaries, but we may be sure that most, if not all, of them felt in a greater or lesser degree the call of solitude, the longing for complete isolation from their fellow-men, where they could pray and listen to the "still, small voice" of God, and prepare for the work He had marked out for them. For instance, we are told that the angel of God appeared to Moses after he had led his flock "to the interior of the desert . . . to the mountain of God even to Horeb," and that God spoke to him there.

We read that Aaron was told to "go into the wilderness to meet Moses," and that there Moses confided in him, and told him of the commands he had received. . . . "Ecce elongavi fugiens et mansi in solitudine."—"Lo then, I would wander far off and remain in the wilderness," says the Psalmist.

Sometimes we read that these hermit-souls were "led by the Spirit" apart to desert places, where God spoke to them. We are also told that some deliberately sought out solitude for themselves, apparently feeling that they could make no headway, that their lives were void and useless, so long as they frequented the haunts of men, with their multifarious distractions.

St. John the Baptist, the "herald of Eternal Light," who is referred to by the medieval English hermit Richard Rolle, in his work, *The Fire of Love*, as . . . "prince of hermits after Christ . . . chose the solitary life." He was a Nazarite from birth, spent his youth in the desert, and, when thirty years old, appeared in the Judean desert, preaching penance, the coming kingdom, and baptism for the remission of sins. St. Matthew tells us: "the same John had his raiment of

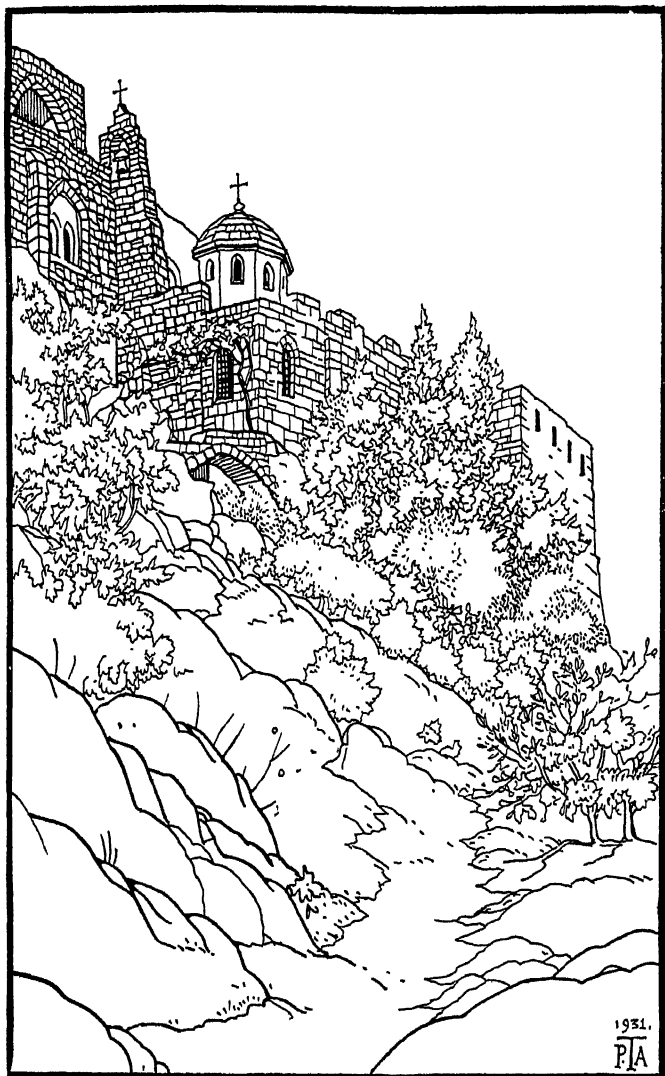
camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey." Local tradition fixes the birthplace of the Baptist at Ain-Karem, a mountain village about five miles from Jerusalem, and no doubt he spent his youth and early manhood in the deserts round about, being gradually prepared, by the solitary life, by communion with God and Nature, for his great work.

Few pilgrims to Palestine seem to find their way to the "desert" of St. John the Baptist, amid whose solitudes the saint is supposed to have spent his earlier years, "until the day when he should manifest himself to Israel." To reach it one has to leave the village of Ain-Karem by one of those typical Palestinian paths that consist of little more than bare rock and loose stones, and which have the habit of disappearing altogether after an hour or so of walking, if one has not already lost one's direction before. There is nothing wild or forbidding about this so-called desert; on the contrary the rocky hill-sides are decked with every species of wild flower and sweet-scented herb. It must not be forgotten that the solitudes in which the Precursor dwelt were deserts according to the Oriental meaning of the word, i.e. solitary places, even if cultivated and fertile. For instance, the "locusts and wild honey," which were the daily food of this youthful solitary, could not have been found except where there was vegetation and a certain amount of cultivation. After a good deal of climbing up and down steep gullies and rough ground, one arrives at last at the gateway of a little hermitage. In such surroundings one would not have been in the least surprised suddenly to have encountered the

"prince of hermits" himself in his raiment of camel hair and wearing his leathern girdle, and to have heard his cry: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make His paths straight." To-day the hermitage is in the care of two Franciscan lay-brothers, who spend their time working in the vineyards and cultivating the garden, thanks to a spring of fresh water found near by, full of vegetables, flowers, and fruit-trees. This spring is to be found in a small grotto, known to the Arabs as "Ain el Habis"—the "Fountain of the Hermit"—from which a flight of steps cut in the rock leads up to another cave in which the Baptist is said to have lived during his long years of solitude in the wilderness.

In after years St. John the Baptist removed to the "desert of Judæa," on the banks of the Jordan, where the pilgrim can visit the fortified monastery of "Deir Mar Jouhanna," or "Convent of John the Baptist," which dates from the third or fourth century.

And not very far off, but nearer Jerusalem, one notices the "high mountain" of Quarantine, "Jebel-Quarrantal," which is the traditional spot in which Christ, having "been led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, fasted forty days and forty nights . . ." that incident in Our Lord's life which has had such a profound influence on all those of His followers who have set out on the quest of solitude. The eastern side of this mountain is pierced with many natural caves. According to an ancient Arab tradition, it was in one of them that "Isa ben Miriam" (Jesus, son of Mary), as Christ is known to the Moslems, spent that long Lent of silence



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DESERT OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST, AIN-KAREM

and solitude, at the close of which "angels came and ministered unto Him."

And there are many other spots in Palestine which remind us of the many occasions in the life of Christ when He left not only the crowded cities and towns, but even His most intimate disciples, and "went up into a mountain to pray"—Mount Thabor, the desert of Bethsaida, the mountain above Tiberias, known as "Hajaret en Nasâra," where took place the miracle of the second multiplication of loaves—to mention but two.

The spirit of the desert must needs enter into the soul of every native of Palestine and Syria. The desert has had its effect upon the country itself, and on its people the moral effects are even more apparent. The true son of the East will never be able to satisfy his soul with the bustle of towns. "He will need the desert for retreat, that his confused mind may calm itself down to order and find new revelations of truth. And when the Syrian retreats to the desert he seems rather to be going home than abroad. David and Elijah, Paul and Mohammed, for various reasons, but with the same urgency, betook themselves to the solitude. Jesus Christ Himself was driven of the Spirit into the wilderness. If temptation waited them there, and the sense of exile and desertion, it was there also that angels ministered to them, and ancient prophecies were fulfilled in those 'streams of spiritual originality which broke forth in the deserts of moral routine' of their times. To their spirit, and to the spirit of all dwellers in the land, the desert is not enemy only, it is home." (John Kelman, *The Holy Land*, p. 34.)

From Palestine one's mind travels farther east to India. Here the pious Brahmin, longing to attain the final deliverance on the dissolution of his frail body, has to pass through a succession of four stages in life, including that of the "vanavāsin," or anchorite, until he arrives at the stage of "sannyāsin," or religious mendicant.

The Brahmin anchorites live in the solitude of forests, supporting themselves on roots, herbs, and the leaves of trees, and being dependent on charity for clothing and other necessities. They inflict severe penances on themselves and practise extraordinary mortifications. In Burma the traveller will often be shown hermitages or anchorites' cells in which solitaries have dwelt.

Gautama Buddha, "The Enlightened," who appeared in India some five hundred years before Christ, left the luxury of his royal home at the age of twenty-nine, and spent six years in almost complete solitude, finally attaining "salvation" while sitting under the sacred Bo-tree at Gaya in Magadha.

He founded communities of men, the Sangha, who lived the eremitical life. Later, Buddhist monasticism developed from the eremitic life to the cenobitic, as is the case with Christianity. According to Buddhist teaching, salvation could only be found by embracing the monastic state, and in the early days of Buddhism this was a form of the solitary life. Many of the Buddhist monks were, and are still, wandering hermits, who work at no trade, but live on alms. Recent travellers, in their descriptions of the vast Buddhist monastic establishments in Tibet, have mentioned that there are many instances of monks leaving their

monasteries and seeking greater solitude in hermitages under the spiritual direction of a "master."

Greek civilization and religious thought do not appear to have had any direct influence on the quest for solitude, although neo-Platonism certainly encouraged the tendency to withdraw from the world in order to lead an ascetic and contemplative life. According to Abbot Butler (*Historia Lausiaca of Palladius*, i, p. 229) "neo-Platonism appears to have remained a purely personal matter and not to have led to the practice of the eremitical life or the formation of religious communities."

How far the life of the early Christian solitaries in Egypt was influenced by pagan practices is still a matter of dispute, although some of the ancient papyri¹ refer to recluses who were dedicated to the god Serapis, the god of healing? There is a legend that one of these hermits was a Macedonian, named Ptolemy, who lived at Memphis about the year 165 B.C.

In his *Christian Monasticism in Egypt* (p. 19), Dr. Mackean states that "there is mention also of Apollonius, brother of Ptolemy, and Thauas and Thaus. The two latter were priestesses, who were known by the official title of 'the twins,' probably because twin sisters were originally chosen for the purpose." The same authority informs us that these solitaries lived in the temple and engaged in various duties, such as bringing to Serapis the votive gifts made for the welfare of the royal family. They also took part in the funeral services of notable personages. In return for these services the recluses obtained a home and

¹ *Acad. des Inscript. et Belles-lettres. Mem. présent. par divers savants.* (Series I, ii, 1852, pp. 552 et seq.)

an allowance of food—bread, oil, and flax. They were but few in number and were forbidden to leave the precincts of the temple, though they were allowed a certain amount of intercourse with the outside world.

Recluses entered the service of Serapis for various reasons—to seek a revelation, to obtain a cure, or to consult an oracle by the “rite of incubation.” They were very poor and often complained of their condition. They were not bound to celibacy, nor particularly characterized by religious fervour, and indeed their whole aim and mode of life seems to bear little resemblance to that of the later Christian hermits and solitaries of Egypt.

A number of authorities maintain that Pachomius (the founder of Egyptian cenobitism) had been a monk of Serapis, though there seems to be very little real evidence in support of this theory.

After he left the army, Pachomius retired to Chenoboskion (or Schenesit) in the Southern Thebaid, where, according to the Greek account (*Vit. Pach.*, f. 3), he received a vision which revealed to him his future mission. Then, wishing to become a monk, he went to a hermit of whom he had heard, by name Palæmon.

The Arabic and Bohairic accounts,¹ however, give us more details, and go on to say that Pachomius, wishing to find a secluded place, chose Schenesit, where he found a small temple on the river bank, named by the ancients as a “temple of Serapis.” He remained here for a while, spending his time in prayer and in cultivating vegetables in his garden. He was baptized in the neighbouring church, and was vouchsafed in a dream the knowledge of his mission. Once,

¹ *Annales du Musée Guimet*, xvii, fo. 6, fo. 342.

during an epidemic, he devoted himself to tending the sick, and later, finding it difficult to live in solitude owing to the crowds which surrounded him, determined to become an anchorite. Leaving his house and garden in the care of an old monk, he sought out the hermit Palæmon.

There is little in the Arabic and Bohairic accounts which supports the theory that Pachomius was a hermit (or monk) of Serapis. His care of the sick was entirely contrary to Serapean custom, and had he been attached as a monk to the temple of Serapis referred to, he would certainly not have returned there after baptism. Furthermore, Serapean recluses were always found in frequented places, whereas Pachomius went to Schenesit because it was quite deserted, and suited his purpose, for the time being, at least. Again, his river-side dwelling-place was, according to the Bohairic account, only known through tradition as a temple of Serapis.

It is rather doubtful if the *Essenes* can be described as "solitaries," despite their ascetic lives and a certain resemblance to early Christian eremitical communities. At one time it was supposed that the *Therapeutæ* were a body of Jewish ascetics and had some connection with the *Essenes*. But the later researches of P. Wendland and F. C. Conybeare seem to have refuted this theory. However, there can be no doubt that the *Therapeutæ* were genuine "solitaries."

The *Therapeutæ* had their chief centre just outside Alexandria, on the shores of Lake Mareotis. Among these, women were to be found, though this was evidently not the case among other communities of the Order. They lived in mean and scattered houses,

probably like those of the early Christian hermits in Egypt, near enough to afford mutual protection when necessary, but not too close to disturb the solitude which was so greatly prized. Each house contained a room devoted to prayer and meditation. During the week, the Therapeutæ lived apart and meditated in solitude, but on the Sabbath they ate and prayed in common. Their so-called feasts (where only cold water was drunk and where no flesh was served), especially that held on the eve of Pentecost, were famous. At these feasts the philosophic discourse was the chief feature. This was followed by hymns and the *pervigilium*, celebrated with antiphonal and joint singing and with choral dancing in imitation of Moses and Miriam at the Red Sea.

The Hemerobaptists, or "Tobele-Shaharith," were another Order, similar in character, whose daily ablutions were a matter of ritual, but these were not solitaries. By tradition they acclaimed John the Baptist as the founder, or at least an adherent of their sect.

Owing to the influx of so many different religious cults into Egypt during the first four centuries of the Christian era, not only from Greece and Palestine, but also from Asia, it is difficult to say how far the first Christian solitaries in the flight to the desert were influenced by non-Christian thought. As has already been stated, the "example of Elijah, the Baptist, and St. Paul, who had sought the desert, at least for a time, does not appear to have had any influence, although Jerome and Cassian saw in such figures of the Scriptures the fathers of monasticism" (Jer., *Epist.* 22, 125; Cassian, *Coll.* xviii, 6). But from the days of Christ, Christians had been conscious of a

certain feeling of isolation from the world (John xv, 19, xvii, 14; 1 Peter i, 11), as it was expressed later in the second-century anonymous Epistle to Diognetus, (vi): "Christians have their abode in the world, and yet they are not of the world." This attitude was naturally strengthened by the early belief in the Parousia, or the impending advent of Christ to judge the world, by the opposition and persecution of the State, and by the growing corruption and licence around. It is said, moreover, that during the reign of Antoninus Pius (138-61), an abbot named Frontonius gathered together seventy disciples and took them to live in the Nitrian Desert, where they cultivated the ground, and led ascetic lives, and considering the climate and geographical conditions of Egypt, it would not be surprising if other cases had occurred, especially in times of stress and persecution. We know certainly of one in Palestine, for Narcissus, bishop of Jerusalem (c. 200), "fled from the whole body of the Church, and hid himself in desert and secret places and remained there many years." (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* vi, 9.)

But such cases can hardly have been either frequent or well-known, for Tertullian, in answering the charge brought against Christians for being useless in the affairs of life, said: "We are not Indian Brahmins or Gymnosophists who dwell in woods and exile themselves from ordinary human life." (*Apologia*, 42; Mackean, *Christian Monasticism in Egypt*, p. 66.)

But all the details we have written so far are but vague surmises when compared with the vast amount of definite historical information that meets us when we come to the third century after Christ, and reach the era of the Egyptian solitaries, often referred to

as the "Fathers of the Desert." Of these the names of Anthony and Pachomius stand out in the front rank as leaders of an immense multitude of men and women who fled from the world into solitude. One would hardly expect such a writer as the author of *Westward Ho!* to be an apologist on behalf of these Egyptian solitaries, yet few modern writers have treated their lives and their surroundings so sympathetically.

"We must picture to ourselves," says Charles Kingsley, "mountains blazing day after day, month after month, beneath the glorious sun and cloudless sky, in an air so invigorating that the Arabs can still support life there upon a few dates each day, and where, as it has been said, 'Man needs hardly to eat, drink, or sleep, for the act of breathing will give life enough'; an atmosphere of such telescopic clearness as to explain many of the stories which have been told of Anthony's seemingly preternatural powers of vision; a colouring, which, when painters dare to put it on canvas, seems to our eyes, accustomed to the quiet greys and greens of England, exaggerated and impossible—distant mountains of pink and lilac, quivering in pale blue haze—vast sheets of yellow sand, across which the lonely rock or troop of wild asses or gazelles throw intense blue-black shadows—rocks and cliffs not shrouded, as here, in soil, much less in grass and trees, or spotted with lichens and stained with veins; but keeping each stone its natural colour as it wastes—if indeed it wastes at all—under the action of all but rainless air which has left the paintings on all the old Egyptian temples fresh and clear for thousands of years; rocks orange and purple, black, white and yellow, and again and again beyond them

glimpses, it may be, of the Black Nile, and of the long green garden of Egypt and of the dark blue seas." (*The Hermits*, p. 128.)



ST. PAUL, THE FIRST HERMIT

Modern critics are inclined to disbelieve the details of St. Jerome's famous *Life* of St. Paul of Thebes, the so-called first hermit, for it is apparently largely legendary in character. Yet there would seem to be no sufficient evidence for doubting the existence of this famous solitary who lived in a cave near the Red Sea, where he was visited by St. Anthony not long before his death, about 340.

Anthony, who can rightly be called the father of Christian solitaries, was born at Coma in Middle Egypt about A.D. 250.

At the age of twenty, on hearing of the counsel given by Our Lord to the rich young man to forsake all and follow Him, and feeling that it was a special message to himself, he proceeded to distribute his wealth to the poor, and after having lived an ascetic life in his own home for a while, resolved to seek a more complete solitude. Not far from the village where he dwelt was a group of hermits. He decided to join them and set himself to imitate their respective virtues. It was not long before he had

surpassed them all in holiness. Here he lived for fifteen years. About the year 285 he removed to Pispir, to-day Der el Memum, a deserted fort south of Memphis on the banks of the Nile. Here he lived in complete isolation for over twenty years, when disciples began to gather round him, and to imitate the virtues of their master. His manner of life was an austere one. His food consisted of bread that was brought him every six months. A spring of water supplied his drink. He seldom emerged from his retreat, devoting his days and nights to prayer and contemplation, or wrestling with the diabolical visitants whose attacks are described at length in the *Vita Antonii*. The year 305 is an eventful date in the history of the solitary life, for then it was that the door of Anthony's



ST. ANTHONY

hermitage was forced open by a band of would-be followers. It marks the beginning of Christian monasticism. However, Anthony did not remain long with his disciples. He left Pispir and set off across the desert, in the direction of the Red Sea. After journeying for several days he arrived at an oasis at the foot of a mountain (still called Der Mar Antonios). Here he remained for the rest of his life, spending his time in prayer and self-discipline, the cultivation of a patch

of ground and the weaving of baskets. Except during his two last years, when he was attended by two disciples, Anthony lived at "The Inner Mountain" (as it is called to distinguish it from "The Outer Mountain" at Pispir) in absolute solitude, having found that peace of soul which he had sought so long.

"The eastward view from Anthony's old home must be one of the most glorious in the world, save for the want of verdure and of life. For Anthony, as he looked across the blue waters of the Gulf of Akaba, across which, far above, the Israelites had passed in old times, could see the sacred peaks of Sinai, flaming against the blue sky with that intensity of hue which is scarcely exaggerated, it is said, by the bright scarlet colour in which Sinai is always painted in medieval illuminations." (Charles Kingsley, *The Hermits*, p. 128.)

And here he died in 356, at the age of a hundred and five years. He asked to be buried in a place unknown to others, and his wishes were faithfully carried out.

Even before the death of Anthony the eremitical life he himself had adopted had been imitated by hundreds of others. All along the banks of the Nile, and in the heart of the desert, were to be found a whole series of monasteries, or more correctly, groups of scattered huts in which the hermits lived. The solitary life continued to attract both men and women in Egypt throughout the fourth century, and it would be impossible for us to give anything like an adequate account of even the most famous of these doughty spiritual athletes of the desert. You will find the lives told in the *Conferences of Cassian* and the *Lausiac History of Palladius*.

The original centre of the solitary life in Egypt was

at Pispir—the “Outer Mountain” of St. Anthony—in whose *Life* the following picture of the lives of the hermits is drawn for us. “Their cells were in the mountains, like tabernacles, filled with holy bands of men who sang Psalms, loved reading, fasted, prayed, rejoiced in the hope of things to come, laboured in almsgiving, and preserved love and harmony one with another.” Among the famous solitaries of Pispir were Hilarion, who introduced the solitary life into Palestine; Macarius, the founder of the eremitical community of Scete; and Paul the Simple.

Some forty miles or so north of Thebes was another settlement of hermits, called Chenoboskion, founded by Palæmon early in the fourth century. Here the more famous Pachomius lived as a solitary until he left to found the monastery of Tabennesi.

The largest settlements of hermits were in the deserts of Nitria and Scete, and, possibly because they were easier of access than those situated in Upper Egypt, we have a greater knowledge of them. Nitria lies in a valley of the Libyan Desert, sixty miles south of Alexandria. It is known to-day as Wady Natroun. The valley extends for thirty miles east and west, between two ranges of mountains. Palladius, in the *Historia Lausiaca*, mentions three distinct settlements of solitaries in this district—Nitria, Cellia, and Scete. “In Mount Nitria,” he writes, “five thousand monks dwell, following different manners of life, each according to his power and desire; so that any one could live alone, or with another, or with several. In the mountain there are several bakeries and a great church, by which stand three palm-trees, each with a whip hanging from it: one for the monks who misbehave

themselves, one for thieves, and one for chance comers: so that any one who offended and was judged worthy of stripes, embraced the palm-tree and made amends by receiving on the back the fixed number of blows. Close to the church is the guest-house, and any guest who comes in is entertained until he goes of his own accord, even if he stays for three or four years. For the first week they let him stay in idleness, but after that they make him work, either in the garden, or the bakehouse, or the kitchen; or if he be a man of position they give him a book to read, but do not allow him to have intercourse with any one till noon. Physicians dwell in this mountain and confectioners: they use wine and wine is sold. They all make linen with their hands, so that they have no needs. About three in the afternoon, one may stand and hear how the psalmody arises from each habitation and fancy oneself rapt into Paradise. But they assemble at the church only on Saturday and Sunday." (Quoted by Dom Cuthbert Butler in *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. i, p. 523-4.) We have given this description in full as it is of special interest, being the first account of a definitely organized community of Christian solitaries on record.

At Cellia, or the Cells, the hermits numbered about six hundred, each living in a separate cell, so that they could neither hear nor see each other. Palladius and other writers refer to the church where the solitaries met together on Saturdays and Sundays.

The eremitical settlement of Scete, also situated in the sandy and barren wastes of the Nitrian Desert, was founded by Macarius, the disciple of Anthony, about the year 330. Palladius describes his quaint

stratagem for getting away from undesirable visitors—one which many a modern religious superior might envy! He possessed both a cave and a cell, which were connected by a tunnel half a mile long, so that he could escape from one to the other without being discovered. Cassian gives us some details regarding the life of the hermits of Scete, and mentions that the life there was a very hard one, for water could only be obtained at a distance of one to five miles. One of the solitaries lived as far as eighteen miles from the church. The same author states that the hermits spent much of their time learning and repeating by heart the Bible, likewise that their mats were used for sleeping on and sitting, and that bundles of reeds or rushes served them for pillows at night as well as seats in church.

These were not the only communities of Christian solitaries in Egypt. Palladius mentions one not far from Alexandria where there were two thousand hermits. Other vast establishments were situated at Babylon and Memphis, both on the Nile, while we hear of similar groups at Oxyrhynchus, Phoenice Chronius, and near Heracleopolis. Mention must also be made of the colonies of solitaries in the Thebaid and Arsinoite districts.

“The food of all these monastic colonies,” writes Dr. Mackean in his *Christian Monasticism in Egypt* (p. 89), “was very simple: they had their one meal of dinner at the sixth or ninth hour, although some famous ascetics fasted until evening. Except on fast days, the monks did not scruple to break their fast on the arrival of visitors. Some went to great lengths in their abstinence. Moses of Scete once was in the

habit of going without food for several days; some abstained from bread and lived on nothing but beans, or vegetables, or fruit, or herbs; but such extremes were not recommended, nor did the greediness of those who fasted in order to be able to have a large meal command approval. It was usually felt that moderation in fasting should be observed, and the amount of food should vary according to individual age and strength. For some could fast more rigorously than others. 'The sickly food of moistened beans does not agree with everybody,' nor does a diet of fresh vegetables or dry bread alone; for some two pounds are not enough, for others six ounces are too much. (Cassian, *Instit.*, V, 5.) The canonical allowance of bread was fixed at two biscuits which scarcely weighed a pound, and it was considered advisable to keep one of them until the evening in case visitors arrived and courtesy demanded the partaking of food with them."

Cassian gives us a description of a "most sumptuous repast" of which he partook one Sunday—a strange "pottage" consisting of oil, table-salt, three olives, a basket of parched vetches called "trogalia," of which each had five grains, two prunes, and a fig (*Coll.*, VIII, i).

The hermits did not sleep much during the night, only lying down for an hour or two before dawn.

It is to Pachomius that we owe the introduction of cenobitic monasticism. He was born in Upper Egypt about A.D. 292, and after having been a soldier (as we have already stated), joined a group of ascetics living under the direction of Palæmon. Later on he retired still farther into the desert and built a monastery at Tabennisi on the right bank of the Nile, near the

modern Denderah. Other monasteries were soon founded, and before long Pachomius drew up a rule for the various communities. Unlike the hermits of Nitria, the monks of Tabennisi were highly organized. They were bound to a common rule of life and obeyed a recognized superior. They devoted themselves chiefly to manual work and to the study of Holy Scripture.

Their fasts and abstinences were not so rigorous as those of the hermits. The prayers to which they were bound were few in number, so that all might be able to take part in the Office "without being distressed."

There are several versions of the Rule of Pachomius in existence. The version given by Palladius is probably one of the earliest recensions.

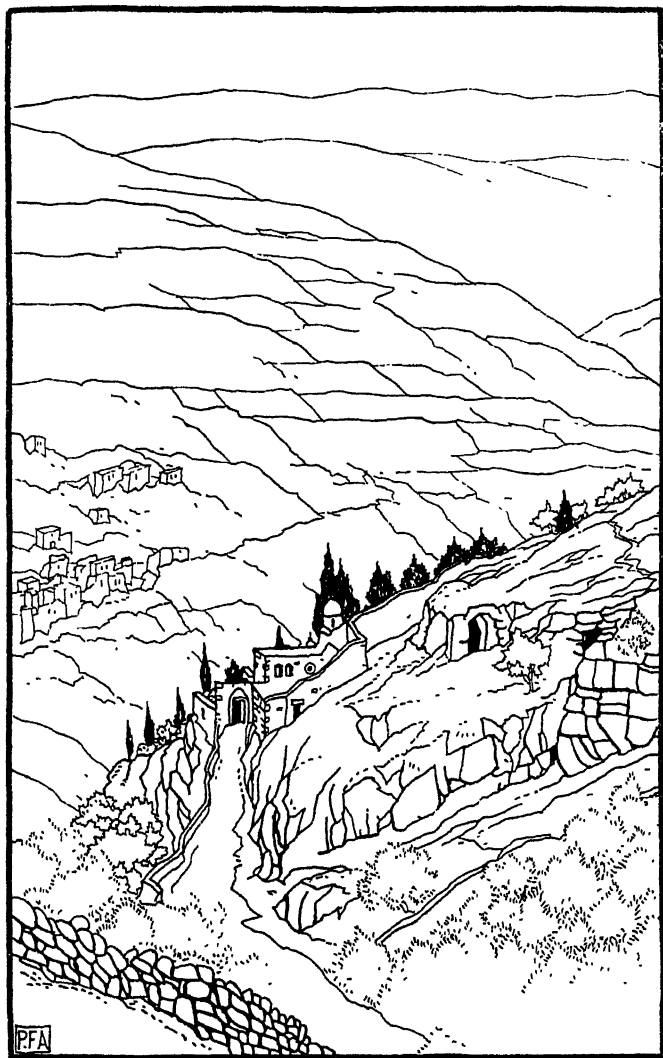
As compared with later monastic rules the Rule of Pachomius is very short. It seems that it was only intended for the "weaker brethren"; those who were more advanced in the ways of the spiritual life were not supposed to need a rule. Prayer, meals, and clothing are the chief points for which there is legislation. The community was to be divided into twenty-four sections, called by the names of the letters of the Greek alphabet, the letters corresponding with the characters of the monks in some mysterious manner known only to the Superior and the initiated. Zöckler (*Askese und Mönchtum*, p. 203) thus sums up the character of the Rule of Pachomius: "Its clear-cut style, its quick advance from point to point, its freedom from casuistic detail, make us recognize its originality."

In a Pachomian monastery the quarters of the religious consisted of separate houses, each of which

contained from twenty-two to forty monks, each with his own cell, with a common-room for conferences. Here then is the essential difference between the Antonian and the Pachomian monasticism: the former is purely eremitic, the monks living in separate cells or huts around the church at various distances from it, where they met for worship on Saturdays and Sundays. The latter is definitely cenobitic, the monks living together under the same roof and meeting together several times daily in church for prayer.

Pachomius, like St. Benedict a hundred years later, had realized that for the majority of men who wished to embrace the monastic state, the "common life" lived in community under obedience to a superior was a necessity, and in the words of St. Benedict, it is only "those who, not in the first fervour of religion, but after long probation in the monastery, have learned by the help and experience of many to fight against the Devil; and going forth well armed from the ranks of their brethren to the single-handed combat of the desert, are able without the support of others, to fight by the strength of their own arm, God helping them, against the vices of the flesh and their evil thoughts." (*Rule of St. Benedict*, C. I.)

But the solitary life soon spread to other countries besides Egypt. Hilarion, one of the disciples of St. Anthony, introduced the eremitical life into Palestine about 306, establishing his first monastery near Gaza, where he soon gathered round him more than a thousand followers. It is in Palestine that we first come across what are known as "Lauras," i.e. colonies of hermits gathered into villages, formed of cells or



HERMITS' CELLS AND GREEK MONASTERY, VALLEY OF
HINNOM, JERUSALEM

huts within a definite area. Life in a "laura" was a sort of intermediate stage between that of the solitaries of the Egyptian desert, practically independent of each other, and the Pachomian or later Benedictine monasticism, where the members lived in community. The hermits of a "laura," while living apart in their cells, were always under obedience to a superior, and followed a common rule.

It was but natural that Mount Sinai, with its Biblical associations, should attract those in quest of solitude. One of the first hermits to settle there was St. Nilus. But Jerusalem seems to have been the favourite centre, and around its walls there were soon gathered thousands of hermits, reference to whose manner of life will be found in the descriptions of the pilgrim Etheria. Rufinus of Aquileia, the friend and afterwards the adversary of St. Jerome, lived for many years as a solitary on the Mount of Olives. Here also dwelt the hermit Adulius, who in the words of Palladius, "practised ascetism beyond the powers of humanity . . . for on account of his excessive abstinence and vigils he was suspected of being a ghost. . . . From the evening until the monks met for prayer on the Mount of Olives, on the hill-top where the Ascension of Jesus took place, he remained standing, singing and praying all the time. And whether it snowed or rained, there he stood and never moved." (Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, c. 43.)

The solitary life took firm root in Mesopotamia and northern Syria, especially in the neighbourhood of Antioch, Edessa, Berœa, and Chalcis. Strange stories are told of St. James of Nisib who lived as a hermit. In summer he retired to the forests high up on the

mountains, in winter hiding himself in a cave that afforded but scant shelter from the cold. He ate the fruit of trees, and herbs that grew in the fields, but never ate cooked food. His only clothes were a rough coat of goat's hair. St. Jerome lived as a solitary in the desert of Chalcis, overlooking Mount Lebanon, "in the scorching heat of the sun, where to partake of cooked food was regarded as an exhibition of intemperance." (St. Jerome, *Ep. XXII ad Eustochium*, 7.)

It was near Antioch that St. John Chrysostom spent six years in solitude after his mother's death, until his indiscreet austerities obliged him at length to return home.

Northern Syria was the home of that strange race of solitaires known as "stylites," i.e. monks who lived on pillars. Perhaps the most famous of them all was St. Simeon, or Simon, who died about 459. He used to pass the whole of Lent without eating or drinking, standing erect for many consecutive weeks. Once he had himself fastened by a chain to a rock. Later on he established himself on a pillar, at first ten feet, afterwards thirty feet high. His fame spread as far as Gaul, and he converted great numbers who came to visit him from Syria, Persia, and Armenia.

For a long time the monks of Mesopotamia and Syria continued to live in almost complete isolation from each other. This unchecked freedom had great disadvantages and led to many abuses, since they were without any sort of ecclesiastical control or supervision until the time of the Council of Chalcedon (451).

The introduction and adaptation of the eremitical life into Asia Minor and eastern Europe is due to St.

Basil. He was born at Cæsarea in Cappadocia about 329, and after his education had been completed, and having spent some years as a teacher, he made a long tour of Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia, so as to gain a



SYRIAN HERMIT,
LAURA OF S. CHARITON



EGYPTIAN ANCHORITE

first-hand knowledge of the lives of the solitaries. He studied their manner of life, and on his return to Asia Minor withdrew to a solitary place on his own estates on the shores of the Black Sea, east of Sinope. Here, "beside a roaring waterfall, amid deep glens and dark forests, with distant glimpses of the stormy sea beyond" (C. Kingsley, *The Hermits*, p. 163), he lived

the life of a hermit until he was raised to the episcopate in 370. Disciples gathered round him, and the rule he gave them is the first outline of the *Institutes*, which he drew up later on.

Basil's own romantic description of this retreat overlooking the Black Sea, which shows an unusual appreciation of the beauties of Nature for a writer of that period, is somewhat different from that given by his friend Gregory Nazianzen, who seems to have visited the place in winter. He shuddered at the recollection of the biting winds, the cheerlessness of Basil's hut, the fruitless labours in the garden, and the poverty of the meals, when his teeth found it hard to make any impression on the stale hunks of bread. The place was so shut in by mountains that the sun was rarely seen, the ground so precipitous and overgrown by thorn-bushes that walking was dangerous when not impossible.

St. Basil's writings refer in more than one instance to the eremitical state—especially the letter to an unknown correspondent, *On the Perfection of the Life of Solitaries*. "The only way of escaping from the daily round of anxieties which weigh down the soul," says St. Basil in this letter, "is separation from the world—not only bodily separation, but severance of the soul from the world. This is an essential preliminary. For this purpose solitude, and such a retired place as we have here, are necessary." The so-called "Rules" of St. Basil are not *rules* in the ordinary sense of the word, but rather dissertations on the ascetic life.

It is important to note that St. Basil deliberately discarded the eremitic for the cenobitic form of

monasticism, despite the fact that he himself had lived so long as a solitary. Dr. W. K. Lowther Clark, in his *St. Basil the Great*, has thus summed up the teaching of St. Basil on the question of solitude (p. 85).

"Man is a social animal," he declares, "and we are all dependent one upon another. Love of our neighbours is implanted naturally in our hearts. Christ teaches us the identity of our neighbour with Himself, and the love of Christ and of our neighbour pass and repass into one another. The cenobite is better than the anchorite for the following reasons:

"(1) We are none of us self-sufficient in the matter of providing for our bodily needs.

"(2) Solitude is antagonistic to the law of love, since the solitary is bound to serve his own interests.

"(3) It is harmful to the soul when we have no one to rebuke us for our faults.

"(4) Certain specific Christian duties, such as feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, are impossible for the true solitary.

"(5) We are all members one of another and Christ is our Head. If we separate from our brethren, how can we keep our relation to Christ intact?

"(6) We have spiritual gifts. The solitary buries his one gift, but in a cenobium each shares in the gifts of the brethren.

"(7) Most important of all, the solitary is in danger of self-pleasing, and thinking he has already attained perfection. In the nature of things he cannot practise humility, pity, or long-suffering.

"The cenobitic being the perfect form, it is also the final form. There is no place for any return to the eremitic life. If a man wishes to secede from the

community and lead a solitary, or even a quasi-solitary life with a few others, Scripture justifies the brethren in excluding him from their number. Every such act of self-pleasing is alien to the true spirit of piety."

St. Basil thus puts forward the claims of cenobitism in vigorous and uncompromising fashion. Was he really being consistent with his own teaching and practice? At any rate, his followers and successors did not feel bound to take his words too literally, for both in the Eastern and Western Churches the cenobitic life was generally looked upon as a preparatory stage, a school in which the aspirant might learn the principles of the ascetic life, in order to practise it as a solitary as soon as he was strong enough.

It is rather difficult to understand the reasons for the rigour, not to say the violence, of St. Basil's language in regard to the solitary life, although some commentators maintain that in certain cases his



BASILIAN HERMIT

meaning is ambiguous, for in some passages it is not quite clear whether he is using the terms solitaries or monks in a general or a special sense. Still further difficulty is caused by the words of St. Gregory Nazianzen when he speaks of St. Basil as founding cells for ascetics and hermits at no great distance from his cenobitic communities. (*Or.* 43, 62.) Dr. Lowther Clark sums up the matter thus: "It seems

that St. Basil was wholehearted in this championship of cenobitism. In the monasteries under his control there is no sign that he allowed any passing over to a solitary life. When he became a bishop and was responsible for every department of Church life, he may have found it necessary to tolerate, and perhaps even to further, varieties of monachism of which in the abstract he disapproved. But the common life described in his Rules was unaffected by this, and was handed down to later generations of Greek monks as the consistent working-out of a splendid, if unattainable ideal" (p. 113).

St. Basil never founded an "Order" in the Western sense of the word, but his "reconstruction of the monastic life is the basis of the monasticism of the Greek and Slavonic churches, though the monks do not call themselves Basilians" (C. Butler, *Ency. Brit.*, art. "Basilian monks"), and to a very large extent the spirit of St. Basil still permeates all Eastern monasticism.

After the fifth century the most noticeable feature of all Oriental monasticism is that the eremitic and cenobitic forms exist side by side. This was the case on Mount Sinai, at Constantinople, and Jerusalem, where, in addition to the numerous monasteries of cenobites there were always a number of hermits living in complete solitude—stylites, recluses, and "boskoi," either in lauras or dwelling in separate huts. They were always united under a common superior, and devoted themselves to prayer and manual work. The usual name for these solitaries was "Kelliotēs" or "Celliotai."

In Palestine most of the great lauras were situated

in the mountains east of Jerusalem, towards the Dead Sea. The district was often referred to as "the monastic desert of Jerusalem." Here, in a cave in the desert of Wady-Dabor, lived the famous solitary St. Euthymius the Great. As usual, his sanctity of life attracted others to join him, and, feeling the need imperative of absolute solitude, he returned to the plain of Sahel on the way to Jericho, where after his death a great monastery, the Khan-el-Ahmar, or "Red Caravanserai," was built over the cave he had inhabited.

Another celebrated settlement of hermits was that of St. Sabas, known as the "Great Laura," founded by the hermit-monk of the same name, who retired to a narrow gorge nine miles south-east of Jerusalem about the year 483. To-day the laura of Mar Saba has been transformed into a great fortress-like monastery, partly hewn out of the rock, partly built on artificial terraces—unique in the world both as regards its situation and its architecture. The wall-like cliffs of the gorge are honeycombed with caverns in which the solitaries used to live.

The manner of life in these Palestinian lauras did not differ very much from that followed by the Fathers of the Desert in Egypt. The hermits lived in huts or cells or caves, separate from each other, where they spent their time in manual work and prayer. The superior of the laura visited each hermit two or three times a week to give him spiritual counsel and advice. The hermits met together in church to assist at the celebration of the Liturgy on Sundays and feast-days. The Divine Office was recited privately in the cells, except that of the vigil of Sunday, i.e. Saturday night. Otherwise each religious rose at midnight to say the



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Psalms of the Office, on hearing the signal given by the "canonarch." Both in the *lauras*, as well as in the cenobitic monasteries, the principle that "he that works not shall not eat" was literally observed, and every hermit was obliged to do a certain amount of manual work daily. It consisted chiefly in making baskets. After the seventh century the cenobitic form of monasticism began to supplant the *lauras*, which gradually disappeared altogether, except in a few places such as Mount Athos, where a certain number of hermits can still be found.

Nearly all the Eastern spiritual writers since the fifth century have ranked the solitary higher than the cenobite, notably St. John Climacus, who, in his *Ladder of Paradise*, has much to say on the merits and advantages of the eremitical state. But St. Theodore of Studium, who lived in the eighth century, lays down that the monastic life should always remain true to the rules and spirit of St. Basil, and no doubt the influence of his teaching had not a little to do with the subsequent suppression of *lauras*, and the final triumph of the cenobite monastery.

At Constantinople Justinian laid down that those who felt drawn to live a life of contemplation might have separate cells, but *inside* the enclosure of the monastery, and the number of such cells was to be strictly limited. (See E. Marin, *Les Moines de Constantinople*, and R. Holl, *Enthusiasmus und Bussgewalt beim griechischen Mönchtum*, pp. 193-6.) Thus the anchorite retained his position in the life of the Church, but as a member of the cenobium, in which his status was regarded as a higher mode of life.

Not every monastery in the Near East was influenced

by Theodore of Studium's strong advocacy of the Basilian theories of the superiority of the common life over the solitary life, and the semi-eremitic lauras continued to exist in many places.

In the later medieval, and in modern times the solitary life still retains its place in Eastern monasticism far more than in the West. Readers of Dostoievski's *Brothers Karamazov* will recall the descriptions of the Russian hermit in this famous novel. And in all the numerous books that have appeared in recent years dealing with Mount Athos—that unique microcosm of the Eastern Church—there are references to the anchorites, or Skitæ, who live at a distance from the monasteries in this theocratic republic, but who are reckoned as members of it. They live a much more austere life than the ordinary monks, and most of those religious who have been promoted to the higher grade known as the "Great Habit" are to be found among them. Another type of solitary, to be distinguished from the Skitæ, are the Celliotai, most of them illiterate peasants who live a kind of eremitic life, but with no special religious obligations. The old *ideal* of early Oriental Christian monasticism still survives on Mount Athos as elsewhere in Eastern Christendom, viz. to live the superior life of the hermit, as compared with the more "ordinary" life of the cenobite, although not many have the courage to embrace it. And those monks who have taken the "Great Habit," as it is called, are regarded as having chosen "the better part." On Mount Athos there are many little huts and grottoes, both on the slopes of the mountain itself and on the seashore in which hermits live. They are known as ἐρημίτηναι.

Each monastery has a number of isolated cells known as κέλλια, in which a solitary life is followed by the inmates. Dom Placid de Meester, in the account of his visit to Mount Athos, describes the "venerable anchorites in their caverns or wooden huts," who seemed to be quite oblivious of the passing of a traveller and who gave him no sign of recognition.

Somnolent and easy-going as many of those ancient monasteries in the solitudes of Egypt, Palestine, and Greece have become, they still stand, silent witnesses to those words of St. Jerome: "O Desert, bright with the flowers of Christ! O Solitude, whence come the stones of which the Apocalypse, the city of the Great King is built! O Wilderness, gladdened with God's especial presence! What keeps you in the world, my brother, you who are above the world? How long shall gloomy roofs oppress you? How long shall smoky cities immure you? Oh, that I could behold the desert, lovelier to me than any city." (*Ep.* XIV, 10; *Ep.* II, 1.)

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CHAPTER II

SOLITARIES IN WESTERN EUROPE PREVIOUS TO ST. BENEDICT

THE century that elapsed between the years A.D. 340 and A.D. 440 stands out among all others in the history of the Christian Church as one in which the eremitical life flourished with exceptional brilliance. In rather less than a hundred years, western Europe became peopled with thousands of men and women whose sole aim in life was the attainment of solitude. In other words, the hermit and the anchorite found their recognized places in the ordinary Christian life of the community, whereas hitherto eremitism had not penetrated beyond Egypt, Palestine, and Greece.

The introduction of the solitary life to western Europe was certainly due in the first instance to St. Athanasius, who had arrived in Rome in 339 to seek papal protection after he had fled from Alexandria as the result of his heroic defence of the orthodox Catholic faith against those who professed the Arian heresy. He was accompanied by two Egyptian monks, Isidore and Ammonius. Their arrival in Rome seems to have aroused a certain curiosity and excitement among the pious faithful of the Eternal City, who listened with eager interest to the stories they had to tell of the wonderful lives of the solitaries of Nitria and Scete. Isidore appears to have been the popular favourite on account of his fascinating manners, and before

long he "became known to all the Senate at Rome and to the wives of the nobles." (Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*.)

Very soon all the devout women in Rome were flocking to the Egyptian monk for spiritual advice and direction, among them being the well-known Lady Marcella, who was so inspired by the words of Isidore that she commenced to live more or less as a recluse in her house on the Aventine, her friend Lady Paula, also following her example. But the monk Ammonius, unlike his brother-monk, did not care to mingle thus with the aristocratic Roman society, and continued his eremitical manner of life just as if he were still in the Egyptian desert, declining to visit any of the holy places, save the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul. After three years in Rome, St. Athanasius went to Trier (Trèves), where no doubt he also spoke much of the lives of the solitaries in Egypt and thus familiarized the clergy and laity of the Rhineland with this new kind of Christian asceticism.

In 340 Eusebius, bishop of Vercelli, near Milan, on his return from a visit to Egypt, where he had been much impressed by the lives of the hermits, determined to reform the clergy of his cathedral, making them adopt a definitely monastic, if not exactly an eremitical rule.

Twenty years later the solitary life appeared in France, when St. Martin of Tours established his semi-eremitical community at Ligugé, near Poitiers. Martin was a native of Hungary. After a career as a soldier he had become a hermit, living for some years on one of the islands off the coast of Liguria. On becoming bishop of Tours in 371 he did not abandon the life of

a hermit altogether, but founded another monastery at Marmoutier, two miles from Tours, whither he often retired. At that time Marmoutier was situated in a real "desert" and the lives of its monks resembled those of the followers of St. Antony rather than those of St. Benedict and other later monastic founders. In fact, both Ligugé and Marmoutier seem to have been large "semi-eremital" settlements from which the members went forth from time to time to do mission work in the surrounding country, which was still largely pagan. Dom Butler, in his *Benedictine Monachism* (p. 18), gives an interesting description of Marmoutier. "The monastery was situated two miles from the city in a spot so secret and retired that Martin enjoyed in it the solitude of a hermit. His cell was a wooden hut; he had eighty disciples, most of whom dwelt in caves (still to be seen) hollowed out of the rocks in the overhanging cliff; they were clothed in coarse garments; they rarely left their cells except to assemble for prayer, or for the daily meal when the hour of fasting was over; no art was practised except that of transcribing, and this by the younger monks only, the elder giving themselves up wholly to prayer. The records of the monks of Condat in the Jura, and those of Auvergne and central France found in the pages of Gregory of Tours, display the characteristic features of Egyptian monachism of the Antonian type, the love of the eremital life, and bodily austerities, emphasized and carried to a pitch hardly met with in Egypt, but common in Syria."

Eleven years after St. Martin's consecration as bishop of Tours, St. Jerome appeared in Rome with the bishops Paulinus and Epiphanius to take part in

a council to which he had been summoned by Pope Damasus. Those devout ladies Marcella and Paula, already referred to, hearing of the arrival of this celebrated theologian in Rome, invited him to give lectures on the Holy Scriptures in their home on the Aventine, and later on he became their spiritual director. So greatly influenced were they by his teaching that Marcella shut up her house in Rome and retired to the country in order to have greater solitude. But Lady Paula and some other Roman women belonging to noble families decided to leave Italy and follow St. Jerome back to Bethlehem, where for many years they lived in a convent. One may be sure that all these events attracted great interest, not only in Rome, but in other parts of Europe, and many people discussed this new idea of an eremitical life which had seized upon the popular imagination in much the same way as some quite new religious idea or practice will arouse interest to-day.

Some time about A.D. 400 John Cassian founded the monastery of St. Victor at Marseilles. He had spent some years in Palestine and Egypt, and had been a monk at Bethlehem, where he had known St. Jerome. During his sojourn in the East he had collected all the information he could find as to the lives of the fathers of the desert, trying to gather from the lips of the solitaries themselves the fundamental principles underlying their external observances. He possessed a love of anecdote and carefully treasured up all that he saw and heard. He has been called the "Boswell of the Thebaid," and he recounts fully all the sayings of the hermits. At Marseilles Cassian established a monastery for women as well as for men,

with the definite object of introducing to Europe the eremitical life he had so carefully studied in Egypt. In fact, to quote Abbot Butler (*Benedictine Monachism*), "although in practice monasticism tended to become more and more cenobitical, the theory still was that of the Antonian monachism in Egypt: the dominant feeling was that the more nearly the life could be made to approximate to that of the Egyptian hermits -- the more perfectly was the monastic ideal being carried out, and the great object of European monks was to emulate those of Egypt."

Some eighty miles or so to the east of Marseilles, opposite Cannes, lies the island of Lérins. Here settled in the year 410 a certain monk named Honoratus, who in his youth, accompanied by his brother Venantius and the hermit Caprasius, had travelled through Greece and other parts of the Orient, studying the monastic life. Venantius fell ill and died while they were on their journeyings, and Honoratus and his companion were obliged, on account of ill-health, to return to Europe. They retired to Lérins, which was then infested by snakes and scorpions. Here they were joined by other solitaries, and before long they had formed themselves into a religious community whose life was based on that of the Antonian solitaries in Egypt. Each monk had his own cell, where he ate and slept, all meeting together for the Divine Mysteries and the recitation of the Office. Some distance from the actual monastery, possibly on an adjacent island, were other cells where dwelt in even greater solitude certain religious who had had many years' experience of the monastic life. There seems to have been no written rule at Lérins, oral tradition



ON THE ISLE OF LÉRINS

taking its place, and the superior being more of a spiritual director than a ruling abbot. Not a few of the hermits of Lérins became bishops, among whom were St. Honoratus, who was raised to the see of Arles, St. Hilary, St. Lupus of Troyes, and St. Eucherius.

One day during the first quarter of the fifth century there landed on the isle of Lérins a British youth named Sucat, known in the Latin tongue as Patricius, who afterwards became the great St. Patrick of Ireland. He had escaped from serfdom in Ireland and was eager to learn something of the life and ways of the hermits on the continent of Europe, of which stories had reached him. He had visited several other eremitical communities before he arrived at the monastery of Honoratus, including the island of Capraia. Of the hermits on Capraia, we have an interesting description from the pen of the pagan poet, Rutilius Claudius Namatianus, who visited the island about the year 416. The life of these Christian solitaries filled the Roman poet with horror and disgust, but the bitterness of his attitude only shows us how deeply a new conception of human life had taken root in a fast dying empire.

Patrick remained several years on the isle of Lérins, that "terrestrial paradise," as a contemporary author writes of it, but restlessness began so much to affect him, that, as he says in his *Confessio*, "I saw in the night visions a man whose name was Victoricus coming as it were from Ireland with countless letters, and I read the beginning of the letter which was entitled 'The Voice of the Irish,' and while I was reading aloud the beginning of the letter I thought that at the moment I heard the voice of them who lived beside the wood of Foclut, which is nigh unto

the Western Sea. And thus they cried as with one mouth: 'We beseech thee, holy youth, to come hither and walk once more among us.'"¹ But some time was to elapse before Patrick could respond to the voices that were calling him to Ireland. He was ordained priest at Auxerre by St. Germanus, who, with St. Lupus of Troyes, had gone to Britain in 429 in order to represent the Holy See in the controversy over the Pelagian heresy. Here St. Germanus's interest was aroused on behalf of Ireland. He returned to Auxerre, and consecrated St. Patrick bishop, after which the latter set out for Ireland, on whose shores he landed in 432—just fifteen hundred years ago. Here he laboured as a missionary until his death in 461.

This is not the place in which to give the later history of St. Patrick. All that immediately concerns us is the place occupied by the solitary life in the Celtic Church. There is little doubt that the Irish monks regarded the eremitical life as more perfect than the cenobitic, and among them there was always a tendency to migrate to the desert. "Burning with desire for the more perfect life of unbroken union with God, monks were ready to treat obedience lightly and set out for the desert, even when their abbots opposed their wishes." (Ryan, *Irish Monasticism*, p. 260.)

We read that St. Finnian of Clonard wrote to St. Gildas, asking advice on how to deal with such cases, and St. Columbanus informed St. Gregory the Great that the practice of the Celtic monks abandoning their monasteries for the solitary life was on the increase. In fact, it was quite a common occurrence for Irish monks to leave their cloisters for a remote hermitage,

¹ *Conf. S. Patricii.* § 23.

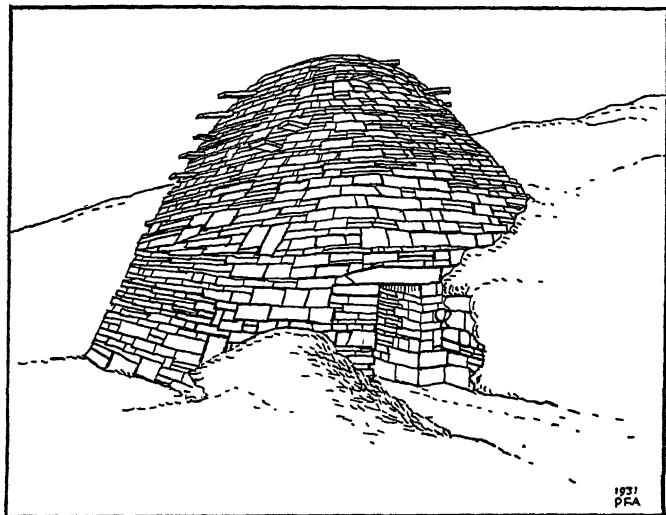
even if their abbots refused permission. Much the same sort of thing also took place in England and Scotland among monasteries of Celtic origin; for instance when St. Cuthbert left the monastery of Lindisfarne in 676 to live as a hermit on the isle of Farne.

Although Irish monastic life was based almost entirely on that of Lérins and other semi-eremitical communities in France and Italy, it presents certain original features and a distinct individuality in its combination of the apostolic and anchoritic ideals. "The Celtic monk pines for the desert," writes Father John Ryan, S.J. (*Irish Monasticism*, p. 407), "where he hopes to settle permanently. Yet meanwhile he has an intense interest in the spiritual welfare of the world. . . . The essence of Celtic monasticism might seem to be retirement from the world, contemplation, peace: yet the very life-breath of Irish monasticism seems to be apostolic work for souls."

We find just the same emphasis on bodily mortification as in Egypt. The quantity of food is reduced to a minimum. Sleep is likewise reduced to a bare minimum. There are long Offices in church, extreme poverty and austerities—fasts, vigils, exposure, nakedness, self-inflicted penances. The preoccupation with bodily austerities which confronts us everywhere in Irish ascetical writings even at a later period shows that it was a racial instinct and a national tradition. Hence, although we may say that Irish monasticism was mainly cenobitical in its outward form, yet the spirit which animated it was everywhere anchoretical.

It would appear that Cassian's theory of the religious life was almost generally accepted in Ireland and it was one which led naturally to solitude, "for the

monk, once the process of purification was complete, had little further need for cenobitical exercises and might consider himself impeded by the society of the brethren. But the line between cenobites and anchorites was not too rigidly drawn." (*Ryan*, op. cit., p. 220.) It sometimes happened that anchorites



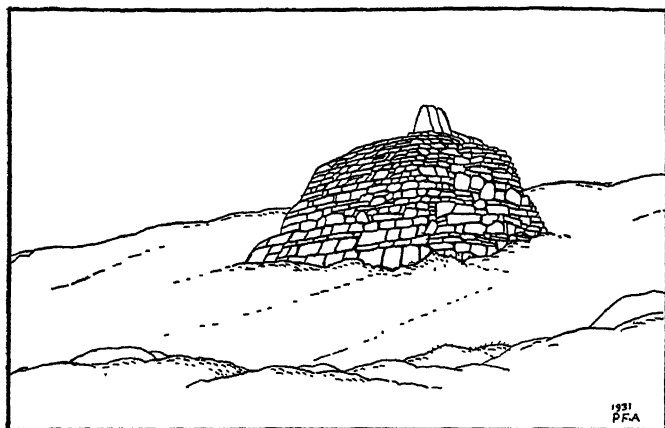
BEEHIVE CELL, GREAT SKELLIG

had to return to their monasteries after living for a while in solitude, being unable to support the loneliness of the life. On the other hand, many Irishmen began and ended their religious lives as hermits, never becoming members of a community.

From the remains that still exist in many parts of Ireland and the written descriptions which have been handed down to us, it is not difficult to reconstruct in imagination the main features of a typical Celtic

monastic settlement. They were invariably surrounded by a fosse or ditch, instances of which can be seen at Ardoiléan, off Galway, Clonmacnoise, Inis Muiredhaigh, Dundesert in Antrim, and other places.

The shape of the enclosure within the fosse varied. Sometimes it was oblong, at other times square or pear-shaped. The church was the chief building,



BEEHIVE CELL, INISHMURRAY

generally being in the middle of the enclosure. More often than not it was built of wood and small in size, just large enough to accommodate the members of the community and no more. A refectory and guest-house were the only other buildings of any size, the actual cells of the monks being no more than detached huts made of wattle or thatch. They were shared by two or three religious in common. Only the older monks appear to have been allowed separate cells. In Egypt each monk had a cell to himself, and except for this detail a description of Tabennisi might do

equally well for Clonmacnoise. Everything was marked by extreme simplicity. Except perhaps in church there was no attempt at architectural ornament or decoration. In addition to the cells of the monks already described, there were often other cells occupied by anchorites, either within or without the enclosure of the monastery. Many of these, built of flat stones, without mortar, and shaped like beehives, can still be seen on the west coast of Ireland.

The solitary life also took root in Scotland and Wales. Llaniltud, Llangarvan, and Caldey Island especially were among the most celebrated monasteries in Wales—Caldey Island became another Lérins, from which missionary monks set sail in their small open boats to evangelize the pagan populations of Brittany, where once again the Celtic monastic life, with its mingling of the cenobitic and anchoritic ideals, became rooted in new soil.

So in little more than a hundred years the solitary life was introduced into many parts of western Europe, and until after the death of St. Benedict in 540, was the normal form of monasticism in Italy, Ireland, Gaul, and Brittany.

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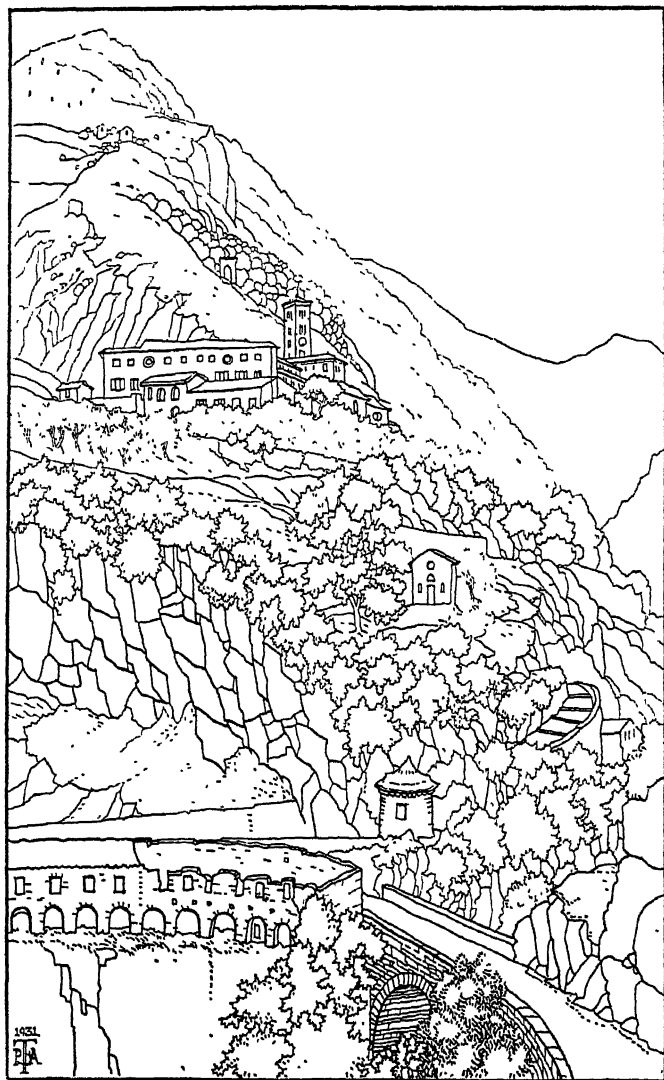
CHAPTER III

BENEDICTINE SOLITARIES

ST. BENEDICT was born at Nursia in Umbria in 480. He was educated in Rome. About the year 500, disgusted with the worldly life and artificial pleasures of the city, he fled from his family and hid himself in a cave about a mile from Subiaco in the Sabine Hills. Here he submitted himself to the spiritual direction of a monk named Romanus, who visited him every week, with a basket of food. For three years he lived here as an anchorite, surpassing in his love of solitude the hermits of the Egyptian desert, for he must have been without Mass or Holy Communion or any share in the normal liturgical life of the Church for the whole of this period. One can still see the retreat in which the "Father of Western Monks" conceived his vast plans, where his genius was trained, and where he meditated on that Rule which was to endure for centuries. In those far-off days "this cave was unknown to every one," writes Abbot Tosti in his *Life of St. Benedict*, "and for this reason it was chosen to hide the secret confided to Romanus. It had for its roof and shelter a very high rock, from which no one can descend, and from below steep precipices and woods make the ascent to it, by any secret path, very hazardous. There runs at its base, in the deep valley, the River Anio. Its running stream was an admonition of the passing nature of our life; the continuous

noise of its waters, a *memento homo* of the eternity of that life which awaits us after death. It looks to the south, and the sudden rise of the mountains on the opposite side takes away the view of the most beautiful landscape, leaving towards the east only a glimpse of the light of heaven, and the brief view of distant heights and of a castle bright in the sunlight. It is a fearful solitude which precludes every breath of human intercourse: savage, affording little of those consolations with which the beauties of nature usually moisten the aridity of the human mind, but powerful in lifting up and keeping in the sight of God, the soul that thinks of him as the Fountain of Wisdom and Love."

Here then, in the solitude of the hills above the ruined palace of Nero, far away from the city of Nursia, of whose lords Benedict was the last remaining scion, outwardly like a wild beast, inwardly like an angel, lived the youthful hermit for a space of three years. His peace of soul was often disturbed by violent temptations of the flesh. One night he threw himself naked into a thicket of thorns and nettles in order to overcome them. His existence and whereabouts having been discovered, he was induced to become abbot of the neighbouring monastery of Vicovaro. But finding that the monks would not submit to his discipline, he returned to his cave at Subiaco, where later a group of disciples attached themselves to him, and they formed a colony of anchorites, living after the Egyptian model. We learn from St. Gregory the Great that their manner of life aroused jealousy and persecution among the local clergy, and Benedict decided to find another retreat,



SUBIACO

and Monte Cassino, situated about half-way between Rome and Naples, was finally chosen. Here it was that St. Benedict wrote his Rule and here he died about the year 547.

The three years thus spent in the "Sacro Speco" (or "Sacred Cave") were merely a phase in the career of the Father of Western Monks, and (to quote Abbot Butler in his *Benedictine Monachism*) "to set up St. Benedict in his cave at Subiaco as the embodiment of the truest Benedictine ideal and the pattern which it would be well for Benedictines, had they the courage and firmness of mind, to imitate, is unhistorical and untrue; no less untrue than it would be to set up St. Ignatius at Manresa as the best embodiment of the spirit of the society he founded. Such episodes in the lives of these and other great founders were only periods of formation and preparation for their work of religious creation, and when they came forth from their retirement they did not shape their institutes on the lines they had themselves first adopted, but in conformity with the lessons they had learned therein. In many things they had turned their backs upon their own early experiences, so that their fully-formed and matured idea is to be seen in the rules and in their institutes in the final form in which they left them."

This is not the place in which to give a detailed analysis of the Rule of St. Benedict. All that immediately concerns us is how far it deals with the desire of a monk for solitude. In the first chapter, *De generibus monachorum*—"of the several kinds of monks and their way of life"—he writes as follows:

"It is well known that there are four kinds of monks. The first are the Cenobites; that is those in monasteries,

who live under a rule or an abbot. The second are the Anchorites or Hermits; that is those who, not in the first fervour of religious life but after long probation in the monastery, have learned by the help and experience of many to fight against the Devil; and going forth well armed from the ranks of their brethren to the single-handed combat of the desert, are able, without the support of others, to fight against the vices of the flesh and their evil thoughts." He also deals with Sarabites who "live in twos or threes or even singly without a shepherd," and Girovagi "who spend all their lives long wandering about divers provinces, staying in different cells for three or four days at a time, ever roaming with no stability, given up to their own pleasures and to the snares of gluttony and worse in all things than the Sarabites." He leaves them on one side and "sets to work by the help of God, to lay down a rule for the Cenobites; that is, the strongest kinds of monks—*fortissimum genus*."

It is interesting to note that in this chapter of his Rule, St. Benedict is actually quoting, not only St. Jerome's version of the Pachomian Rule of Tabennisi, and the Conferences of Cassian, but most curious of all, the reform of Atripé, of which the Egyptian monk Schnoudi was the redactor. It proves that the saint must have studied monastic literature from his boyhood, and no doubt he had scanned the very rules of the Thebaid before framing his own. To these surmises may be added St. Benedict's explicit testimony in the eighty-third chapter of his Rule.

The perfectly clear and definite ideas expressed in St. Benedict's Rule regarding the dangers of solitude

all. Moreover, such a life was the purely contemplative life of Cassian's hermits, without outdoor work. Thus St. Benedict's initiation in the monastic life embraced these four elements—the eremitical life, severe corporal austerity, individualistic or solitary spirituality, and a purely contemplative life in the strictest sense.

“And at first sight the most striking feature in his reconstitution of the monastic life for Italian and Western conditions is that St. Benedict deliberately turned his back on these four things that he had so wholeheartedly practised; he laid down that his rule was for cenobites only, expressly excluding hermits; he eschewed the spirit of austerity as had been hitherto understood to be a constituent element of the monastic life; and it was to the discipline of *family* life and the performance of a round of community exercises, rather than to the personal strivings of an individualistic piety, that he looked for the religious formation of his monks. This is symbolized in the objectivity of his description of the monastery as ‘a school of God’s service,’ not (in accordance with the more subjective ideas of later spirituality) as a ‘school of perfection’: it shows that the idea uppermost in his mind was God’s service, rather than the self-betterment of the monks or their progress in virtue—if we may distinguish what are in reality but two aspects of the same thing. Furthermore, in company with SS. Pachomius and Basil, he ruled out what we have seen was the idea of the Egyptian hermits as to the contemplative life, that it was one from which every outside work, even agriculture, had to be excluded.”

In short, the elements of the older or pre-Benedic-

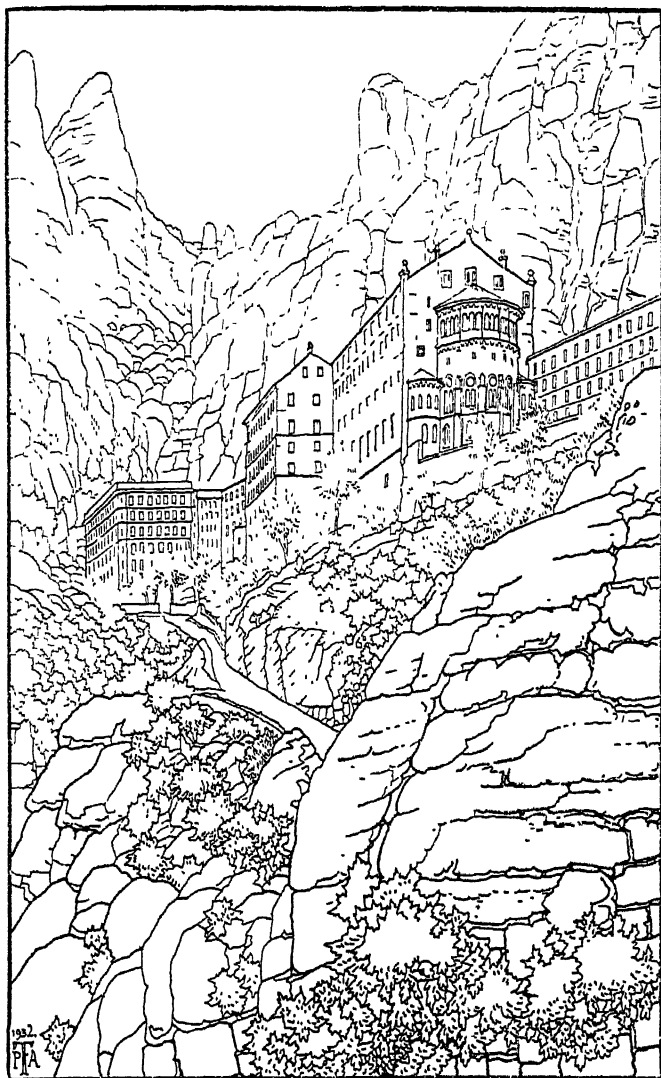
tine monachism deliberately discarded by St. Benedict, as they had also been discarded by St. Basil, were the eremitical life and extreme bodily austerity, two features upon which all religious life in western Europe had hitherto been based.

Before passing on to those religious congregations following the Rule of St. Benedict which grew up in the Middle Ages but which lived a more or less eremitical life, reference must be made to the community of hermits founded by Cassiodorus by the side of his monastery at Vivario, near Squillace, in Calabria. After a period of preparation in the cenobitic life, Cassiodorus allowed his monks to live as solitaries. As time went on many Benedictine monasteries in various parts of Europe had groups of solitaries attached to them, for instance, Montserrat in Spain, St. Guillaume du Desert in Hérault, Marmoutier (in medieval days), Fontenelle, Iona, to mention but a few.

The eremitical life seems to have been lived at Montserrat from a remote period, to judge from the earliest records of this famous monastery in Catalonia. Even to-day the pilgrim can see the little hermitages which for many centuries past were the homes of countless generations of Benedictine solitaries. They are built on the upper part of that mysterious-looking mountain on which the great abbey is situated, and whose jagged peaks recall those of the Dolomites. No better description of the hermitages of Montserrat could be found than that given by Mr. Stuart Rose in his *St. Ignatius and the Early Jesuits*.

"Upon the heights above," he writes, "accessible only by steep staircases cut in the rock, were thirteen detached chapels and cells, each dedicated to its

particular saint, and occupied by monks who lived as hermits, by the permission of the abbot of the monastery; one of their number (the inhabitant of the cell called by the name of St. Benedict) having the immediate direction of the rest. The life of these recluses was one of great austerity; their only diet being bread, herbs, and fish, 'seasoned with frequent fastings.' Once only in the year, on the feast of their great patriarch, the thirteen brethren took their mid-day repast together in the cell of the superior, after receiving Communion from his hands: and on the feast-days of the saints to whom the respective hermitages were dedicated, they met to hold spiritual converse with each other. Except on these occasions or when serious illness obliged them to have recourse to the care of the infirmarian, they never left the cell in which they dwelt until they were carried down to burial, but (as Laborde expresses it) 'elevated above the earth, they breathed the pure atmosphere of heaven, and lived the life of angels.' There were never wanting candidates from among the monks of Montserrat for these solitary abodes, and not a few of these were men of rank, who sought a more complete retreat than that of the cloister. After a year's probation they made their profession of perpetual seclusion: but for seven years more they were permitted to descend to choir both night and day, though they took no part in the chanting of the monks. The seven years ended, they entered on a life of complete solitude, not being allowed even the companionship of pet beast or bird—at least in a cage: but the feathered songsters, it is said, became so familiarized with their presence, that they would come to their call, and pick crumbs



MONTSERRAT

out of their hands. Each hermitage, besides its chapel, had its cistern or fountain, and its little garden-plot filled with flowers and odoriferous plants—wild pinks, roses, and violets blooming there all the year round. They employed themselves also in making wooden bowls, which were eagerly purchased by the pilgrims."

In some articles which appeared in *Pax* (February-May, 1931) we are given some further details concerning the daily life of the solitaries of Montserrat.

"The daily occupations were not left to the hermit's own choice: he followed a fixed rule that checked inconstancy and waste of time. At a quarter to two in the morning, summer and winter, the hermit whose turn it was rang the bell of his chapel: it was answered by the bell of the nearest hermitage, and then the tinkling bells of all of them broke the early silence and called the heroic dwellers of those heights to sanctify the new day God's goodness had granted them. At two precisely, in every chapel, Matins and Lauds of the Divine Office were said and immediately followed by Matins and Lauds of the Office of Our Lady. Then came an hour's meditation, another hour's spiritual reading, and the Office of the Dead. After an interval used for cleaning and tidying the cells, the hermits said Prime and assisted mentally at Holy Mass. Then followed two hours of manual labour, during which the hermit worked in his garden, did any slight repairs needed in his cell, made crosses, spoons, rosaries, and so forth of box-wood, fetched wood for fuel, and so on. Next, having recited the Little Hours and assisted in spirit at the Conventual Mass sung in the monastery church, he lit his fire,

cooked his food, laid the table and dined; after which he took half an hour's recreation, spent in a walk round his hermitage, and then an hour's siesta. From 2 to 8 p.m. his time was spent in saying Vespers, in study, manual labour, spiritual reading, and meditation. After 8 p.m. he had his supper, except on fast-days, then said Compline and, after an examination of conscience, retired to rest towards 9 p.m."

It was to Montserrat that St. Ignatius Loyola turned his steps after his conversion in order to seek the advice of a certain solitary who had a great reputation for sanctity, and who "dwelt high up amidst the loftiest rocks" in the hermitage of St. Dismas, the good thief. "Perhaps as he gained the aerial height on which this cell stood," writes Mr. Stuart Rose, "Inigo cast a hasty casual glance to where—far below, and far away beyond the level plain, beyond the town and port of Barcelona—the surface of the Mediterranean glittered and sparkled in the sunbeams, and his eye might perchance have caught the faint, uncertain outline of the distant Balearic Isles."

Here, among the sons of St. Benedict, the ex-soldier laid down his sword at the feet of Our Lady. Before her altar, on the eve of the Feast of the Annunciation he spent the night in prayer, resolving to devote his life in future to another kind of warfare. Many writers have affirmed that it was after studying the *Exercitatorium* of the Benedictine Abbot Cisneros at Montserrat in 1522 that Ignatius Loyola was inspired to write his *Spiritual Exercises*, which are certainly the direct result of that grim spiritual combat that went on in his soul during his sojourn among the hermits of Montserrat.

For over four centuries, from about 650 until 1100, the Rule of St. Benedict held almost universal sway over monasticism in western Europe. But towards the end of the tenth century a strong impulse arose



HERMIT OF FONTE AVELLANA

to return to the eremitical life. This led to the foundation of the *Order of Fonte Avellana* (c. 1000), *Camaldoli* (1012), *Vallombrosa* (1030), *Monte Vergine* (1118), the *Carthusians* (1084), and the *Celestines* (1264).

The severe *Order of Fonte Avellana* was founded by St. Dominic of Foligno about the year 1000. Having been a monk for some years, he retired to a hermitage near Trisulti, about thirty miles south of Rome, afterwards founding eremitical communities at Cocollo in the diocese of Valva near Salerno, Sora near Frosinone, and at Fonte Avellana in the heart of the Apennines near Sassoferrato. He died in 1031. But it is chiefly due to the efforts of St. Peter Damian that the order has achieved fame. He joined it in 1035 and became Prior in 1043. His ascetic zeal resulted in the drawing up of a rule of incredible austerity for the hermits of Fonte Avellana, whose lives renewed the spirit of the fathers of the Egyptian deserts. But the eremitical life was not kept up for very long at Fonte Avellana,

and within a hundred years of its foundation it had become purely cenobitical, while Trisulti was absorbed into the Carthusian Order.

The Camaldolese and Carthusian solitaries are dealt with in the next two chapters. A few details must now be given concerning the *Vallombrosans*, who started as hermits. The story of the conversion of their founder, St. John Gualbert, son of a Florentine nobleman, who had determined to avenge the death of one of his kinsmen, is probably known to all the readers of these pages. It was on Good Friday 1013 that he set out from Florence with the intention of killing the murderer. He encountered him in a solitary place not far from the city, and drew his sword to run him through. His enemy was unarmed and cast himself at his feet. Spreading his arms in the form of a cross, he begged Giovanni to spare him for the sake of Him whose death they were commemorating that day. Giovanni was so moved that he pardoned the murderer and then went into the church of San Miniato, where, kneeling before a crucifix, he sought forgiveness for his own sins. Looking up at the crucifix, he saw the head move as if granting the

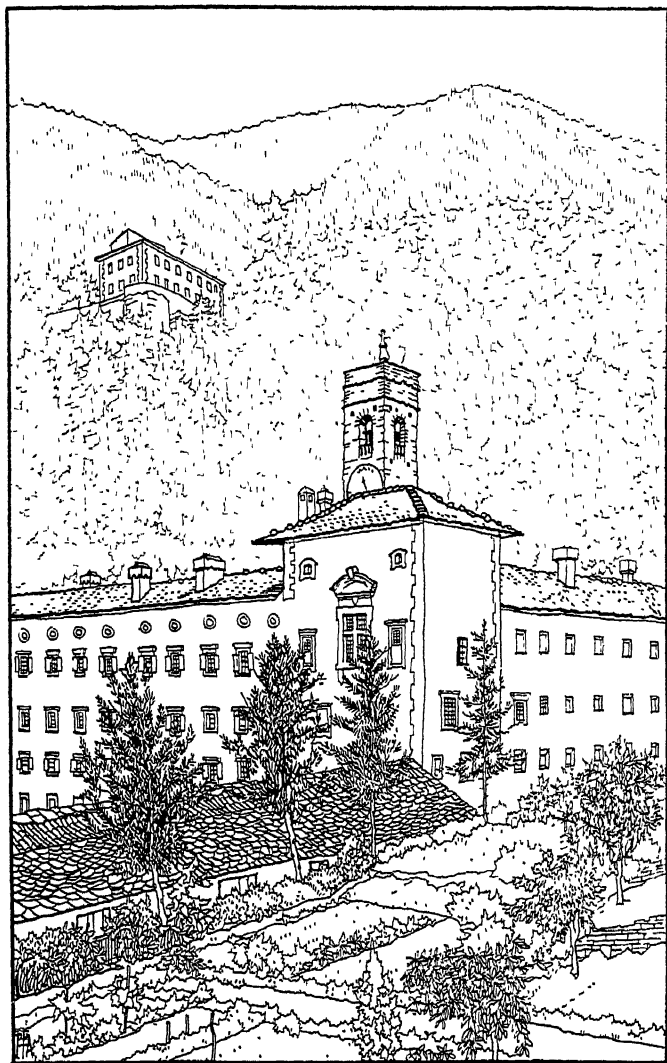


VALLOMBROSAN

pardon asked for. Giovanni resolved to abandon his old way of life and sought admission to the neighbouring monastery of Cluniac Benedictines.

But he did not remain here for long. On account of the simoniacal election of a new abbot, he left the monastery in disgust, and fled to Camaldoli. It does not seem that he stayed with the followers of St. Romuald more than three years, and about the year 1015 he took up his abode in the forest of Vallombrosa, high above the River Arno, where he lived as a hermit. Before long he was joined by other disciples, and thus came into existence the Order of Vallombrosa. At first it was purely eremitical in character, following the Rule of St. Benedict in all other things, but with constitutions of a most rigid character. St. John Gualbert died in 1073, and after his death the Order he had founded became very little different from that of any other Benedictines.

The *Hermits of Monte Vergine*, or *Williamites*, as they are sometimes called, were founded by St. William of Vercelli, early in the twelfth century. After a pilgrimage to Compostella, this young Neapolitan noble left his family and retired to the hills behind Avellino, where he gathered together a few followers on Monte Vergine. Here they lived as hermits in great austerity, basing their life on the Rule of St. Benedict. Their numbers increased rapidly and by 1128 other monasteries had been founded on the Serra Cognata, at Conza, and at Guglieto near Nusco. The later history of the Williamites is similar to that of the Vallombrosans. They gave up the solitary life and adopted the Benedictine Rule, still retaining the white habit and cowl which distinguish them from the majority



VALLOMBROSA

of Benedictines. Monte Vergine is now incorporated into the Cassinese Congregation of the Primitive Observance, commonly called the Subiaco Congregation.

The *Celestines* are so called from their founder,



HERMIT OF MONTE VERGINE

Pietro di Murrone, who was elected Pope in 1294, taking the name of Celestine V. He was born at Isernia, in the Neapolitan province of Molise, in 1215, of humble parents. At the age of seventeen he took the Benedictine habit, but craving for greater solitude than was afforded by his monastery, fled to Monte Morone in the Abruzzi, afterwards to a still more remote solitude on Monte Majella.

His solitary retreat was soon discovered by other kindred spirits, and it was not long before he had become the superior of several communities of hermits. Their life seems to have been incredibly severe. Pietro di Murrone took St. John the Baptist as his model, and his austerities seem to have surpassed even those of the Hebrew prophet. We read of four Lents being kept during the course of the year, frequent fasts on bread and water, long hours spent in prayer, a rough habit of hair-cloth and the wearing of chains, and other self-inflicted penances. In 1264 Urban IV formed them into a congregation, giving them the Rule of

St. Benedict as the basis of their life. Finally in 1294 Pietro di Murrone, much against his will, was elected Pope, owing largely to the influence of Charles II of Sicily. Dragged from the seclusion of his solitude in the Abruzzi and forced to accept the tiara, this old hermit only governed for nine months. In this short space of time he showed such a complete lack of the qualities necessary for a Pope that he decided to resign. His successor, Boniface VIII, tried to keep him in prison, but Celestine managed to escape, and fled to his cell in the Abruzzi. Again captured, he spent the rest of his life shut up in a castle near Anagni, where he died, eighty-one years old, in 1296.

After the death of the founder, the Order increased both in Italy and in other countries, especially France. But it soon lost all traces of its original eremitical character, and its later history, like that of the Vallombrosans, Williamites, and Fonte Avellana, is outside the scope of this book.

A passing reference should be made to the Italian Benedictine congregations of *Olivetani* and *Silvestrini*, both of which started as small groups of hermits, the former at Monte Oliveto, near Siena, in 1313; the latter at Monte Fano, near Fabriano, in 1231. However, these are but a few of the many other houses of reformed Benedictines in other parts of Europe which, during the Middle Ages, laid special emphasis on the "solitary" character of a monk's life, and to deal with which a separate volume would be necessary.

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CHAPTER IV

SOLITARIES OF CAMALDOLI

ST. ROMUALD—"the new John the Baptist," as Cardinal Baronius describes him, was born in Ravenna. Critics do not agree as to the exact date. Some maintain that it was in 907, others are convinced that it could not have been before 957. He belonged to an old noble family. His youth seems to have been wild and dissipated. One day he found himself alone in a forest, when hunting. Suddenly there awoke in his soul a desire for the solitary life, a desire which haunted him until his twentieth year, when his father, Sergius, having had some petty disagreement with one of his cousins concerning a matter of family property, came to blows with him. A fight ensued and the cousin was killed. The young Romuald was so horrified at his father's action that he retired to the monastery of St. Apollinare-in-Classe at Ravenna, in order to do forty days' penance for his father's sin.

One night he had a vision. St. Apollinarius himself appeared in a blaze of light and spoke to him. Romuald now felt no further doubts as to his true vocation. He would break with the world altogether. He asked the abbot of the monastery to clothe him in the Benedictine habit, and after a year's novitiate made his profession. But the community at St. Apollinare seems to have been rather a lax one, or at any rate their observances were not up to the ideals

of Romuald. So he tried to reform his brethren. Very naturally they objected, and if one may believe the story, some of them plotted to kill him. Romuald put up with the life in this monastery for three years. He then left, and sought out a certain hermit named Marinus, who gave him a rule of life which should have been quite austere enough to satisfy the penitential zeal of this converted young nobleman. Three days a week he ate only bread and water; on other days he added a few vegetables and a little wine to his drink. He recited the whole psalter daily, besides other prayers. The old anchorite did his best to test Romuald's vocation. He used to lead him out into the pine-woods near Ravenna, stop under a tree, and recite twenty psalms. Then he would go on to thirty or forty more trees and continue the psalter. Romuald did not as yet know all the Psalms by heart and Marinus would give him a sharp blow on the left ear for every wrong word or other mistake, in order to "accustom him to penances" (to quote St. Peter Damian). After a time Romuald lost his hearing, so he begged Marinus to hit him on the right ear instead. The master, thinking that his disciple had been tried enough in this manner, discontinued his chastisements. Later on the two hermits were joined by three other followers. Romuald, whose zest for penance could never be satisfied, increased his mortifications, and we are told that for a whole year he lived on nothing but boiled peas, and for three years on wild barley, gathered by himself. He would often pass several days without touching food or drink. Suddenly a *wanderlust* seized him and about the year 978 he left his fellow-hermits and disappeared into Catalonia, where he spent another



SACRO EREMO, CAMALDOLI

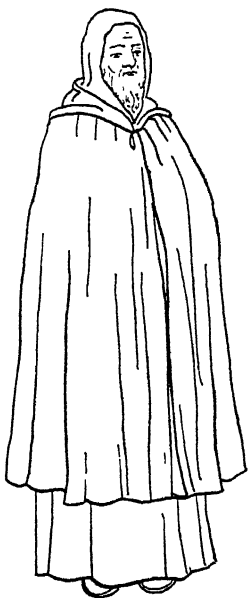
five years. Then we hear of him living a solitary life on one of the islands in the Venetian lagoons. He did not remain there very long, and until 986 he wandered about Italy, finally returning to Ravenna. During these journeys he visited Fonte Avellana, a remote spot in the heart of the Apennines, near Sassoferrato, where he found two hermits, to whom he gave a rule of life. Thus came into being the eremitical Order of Fonte Avellana, whose actual founder, as was explained in the last chapter, was St. Dominic of Foligno.

For a while he settled near Tivoli. We also hear of him at Rome, and at one time he is at Monte Cassino, trying to persuade the monks to adopt the eremitical life. Some time afterwards he set off for Poland and Istria, where he remained for a few years, passing from one group of hermits to another. In 1005 he is back once more in Italy, and finds a refuge at Val di Castro in the Apennines, not far from Fabriano. On hearing of the martyrdom of one of his disciples, St. Bruno-Bonifatius of Querfurt, he is filled with a desire to visit Hungary, where the martyr had laboured. But he falls ill on the journey, and comes back to rejoin the little band of solitaires at Val di Castro.

In 1011 or 1012 he paid his first visit to what is now Camaldoli, having been offered a suitable spot in the Casentino, in Tuscany, where he might build a hermitage. The donor, Count Maldolo, is said to have had a dream in which he saw a ladder going up into heaven, upon which were a multitude of people dressed in white. Did they symbolize the future Order of Camaldolesi? Whether they did or not, Romuald decided to settle in this spot. He was joined by five com-

panions. He ordered a hospice for visitors to be built at Fonte Buono, two miles below the hermitage, and here he placed a monk and three lay brothers. The life of the first hermits at Camaldoli (i.e. Campus Maldoli = the field of Maldolo) nine hundred years ago did not differ essentially from that lived there to-day.

Each hermit had his own cell, separate from the others. They kept almost perpetual silence, and observed strict abstinence from flesh meat. Throughout Lent they fasted on bread and water, except on Sundays. Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday during the rest of the year they fasted on bread and water. On Sundays and Thursdays they were allowed a few vegetables. During Lent they never came out of their cells except to recite the Divine Office in church.



CAMALDOLESE HERMIT

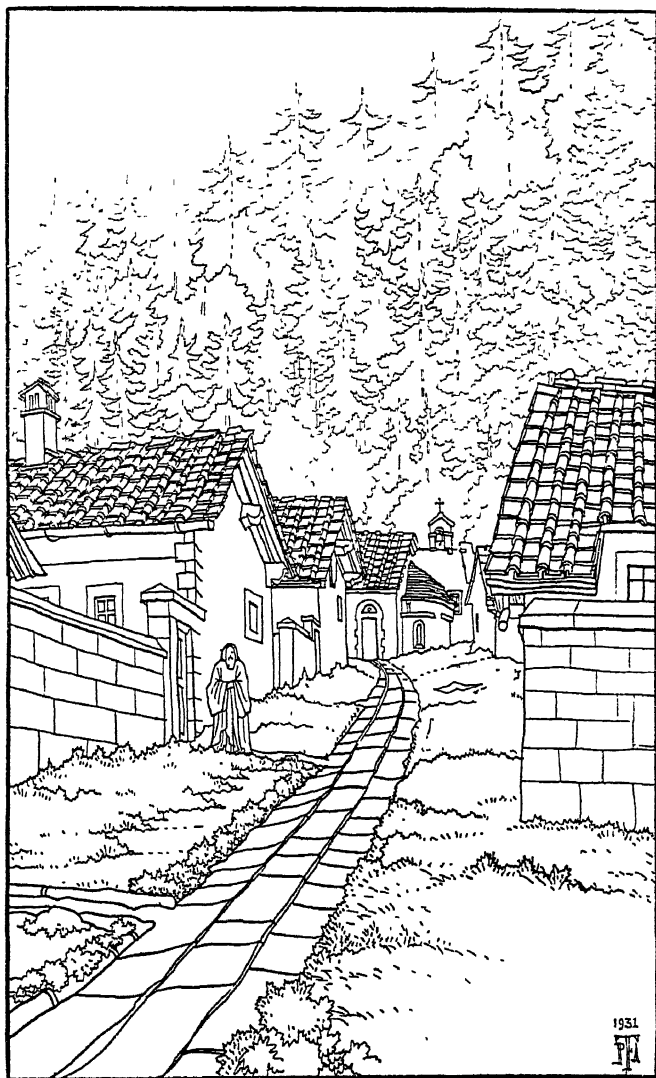
Women were strictly forbidden to come within a quarter of a mile of the hermitage.

St. Romuald himself did not remain at Camaldoli for more than two years, when he set off again on his wanderings. His first stop was at Sitria, among the mountains near Sassoferrato, where he stayed some time, having gathered round him numerous disciples. At that time Sitria seems almost to have rivalled some of the settlements in the Egyptian desert for the number of its hermits and the terrible austerity of their

lives. We read of weird-looking old anchorites who more resembled wild animals than human beings, and who rarely left the caves or rude huts which sheltered them from the rigours of the winter climate in those wind-swept Apennine valleys.

Yet again St. Romuald set off on his travels. He appears to have visited Camaldoli again. Then he returned to Val di Castro, where his last days were spent in the little hermitage which can still be seen there. Here he died on June 19th, 1027, alone and forgotten. Some historians maintain that he was a hundred and twenty years old, ninety-seven of which had been spent as a wandering hermit.

St. Romuald left no written rule and the constitutions drawn up by Blessed Rudolf for the hermits at Camaldoli thirty years after the saint's death are based on the tradition handed down by Romuald's first disciples. These original constitutions greatly modified the austerities of the hermits. Henceforth fasting was to be dispensed with on Thursdays in Lent and on certain greater feasts, and fish and wine were permitted. The Camaldolese Order was not formally constituted as such until 1072, when Pope Alexander II issued the bull *Nulli fidelium*. The rule of silence was also relaxed on certain days, but was still maintained during Lent and on all fast-days. On other occasions conversation was permitted from after Conventual Mass to Vespers. Later on, the hospice at Fontebuono became a separate monastery and, again and again during the course of the Middle Ages, still further relaxations were introduced into the constitutions. By the sixteenth century the rule of life at the "Sacro Eremo" (as the hermitage at Camaldoli is called) had



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SACRO EREMO, CAMALDOLI

become stabilized into very much the same form as we find it to-day. Its characteristic feature is a blending of the eremitic and cenobitic life. In other words, it is the nearest approach to the original form of Christian monasticism to be found in western Europe. The rule is that of St. Benedict, to which are added special constitutions relative to the essentially "solitary" character of the life.

The Sacro Eremo itself is situated at the far end of a deep valley, in the Apennines, some four thousand feet above sea-level, about twenty miles east of Florence. The slopes of the adjacent mountains are clothed almost to their summits with dark pine forests, and no more ideal spot could have been chosen for the home of a community devoted to the quest of solitude, although in these days of the ubiquitous motor car the once silent valley often echoes with the sound of the horn and the harsh changing of gears as the heavily-laden charabancs with their loads of inquisitive trippers wend their way slowly and painfully to the Sacro Eremo.

A high wall surrounds the actual enclosure, and within this are the cells of the hermits—some thirty of them—each with its little garden. Close to the entrance is a group of buildings which include the *foresteria*, or guest-house for men, and the church, adjoining which is another building containing the kitchen, refectory, and lay brothers' quarters (for the latter do not live in separate quarters like the fathers). The cells at Camaldoli can be described best as spacious four-roomed bungalows, as will be seen from my drawings. They are arranged in long rows, divided by broad paved pathways. Entering one of the gate-

ways that lead into the gardens—always gay with flowers in summer-time—one finds oneself before a loggia or porch in which lies a round log for the hermit to sit on, when the rigour of Camaldoli's mountain climate does not prevent him from spending his solitary recreation out of doors. From the porch one passes into a hall or passage-way, which serves more as a place of exercise in winter-time, when the Sacro Eremo is often snow-bound for weeks on end.

The passage leads into the actual living- and sleeping-room, which contains a bed set into an alcove, an open fire-place, and a small table for meals, above which is a hatch through which a lay brother passes the hermit's food. This is carried from the kitchen in a specially-constructed wooden box. Adjoining this room is a tiny study, not much larger than a cupboard, containing a writing-table and bookshelves. On the other side of the living-room is the oratory, with an altar and *prie-dieu*, the walls of which are decorated with a few pious pictures.

Such is the home of a twentieth-century hermit at Camaldoli. Some of the "bungalows" are larger than others—especially that occupied by the prior—but in plan and general features they have not much to distinguish them one from the other. The cells of the novitiate are set in an enclosure apart from the others, the entrance to which is always kept locked, the key being kept by the novice-master.

The Constitutions of both the Sacro Eremo and the Congregation of Monte Corona provide for an even stricter class of solitaries, known as "recluses."

This is the normal "Horarium"—or daily routine—of the present-day Camaldoli hermit. At 1.30 a.m.

the bells of the campanile rouse him from his slumbers. He rises from his bed, puts on his heavy cloak (all the hermits sleep fully dressed on a rough straw mattress), and hurries down the stone pathway to the church to take part in the long offices of Matins and Lauds, which generally last about an hour and a half. Returning to his cell, the hermit can resume his slumber until 6 a.m., when he is awakened again by the sound of the bell and makes his way to church for Low Mass, Meditation, and Prime. On certain days in the year, the prior dispenses them from silence after Prime, and the hermits are allowed to visit each other in their cells and discuss any matters of importance.

Their breakfast—if a cup of coffee and a piece of dry bread can be so termed—is the next item on the horarium. Until 9 o'clock they remain in their cells, when the bell summons them to church for Tierce, Conventual Mass (generally sung), and Sext. This being over they return to their cells and occupy themselves with various kinds of work. This may take the form of gardening, or other manual labour, writing or study, or anything adapted to the capacity of the individual and in keeping with the spirit of the Order to which he belongs.

At 11.45 they meet in church to say Nones. Dinner is served at midday and is eaten in the solitude of the cell except on about twelve days in the year, when the hermits come together in the refectory. Meat is never allowed, but otherwise the food is plentiful and well cooked. An hour's siesta follows, but many of the solitaries devote this time to prayer or study. Vespers are sung at 3.30 in summer, during winter an hour or so later. On days when the rule of silence



THE CELL OF ST. ROMUALD, CAMALDOLI

has been dispensed, the hermits are allowed to go out for a walk in the surrounding forest after Vespers. About an hour before sunset the hermits assemble in church for the last time for the office of Compline,



CAMALDOLESE HERMIT

which is preceded by a short spiritual reading in the chapter-house. After Compline the Litany of Our Lady is sung; then the community return to their cells for the night. They eat their frugal supper and soon afterwards retire to rest until the silence of the night in those lonely mountains is broken by the sound of the bells calling them to begin once more their daily round of spiritual exercises.

The climate at Camaldoli is extremely severe. In winter snowstorms are frequent, and on more than one occasion the solitaries have been imprisoned in their cells owing to the paths being blocked with snowdrifts. Sometimes clouds hang over the mountaintops for days on end, and the Sacro Eremo is shrouded in a damp, clammy mist. Despite its remote situation, the Sacro Eremo is not so cut off from the outside world as one might imagine. Both the telephone and the electric light are to be found there, and an up-to-date meteorological laboratory.

In the limited space at my disposal I can only give

a brief outline of the later history of the Camaldolese Order. During the Middle Ages it developed rapidly all over Italy, but the cenobitic character of its life became more and more emphasized at the expense of the eremitical. In 1212 a hermitage was founded at Venice. The number of solitaires increased rapidly and other foundations were made. However, before long, most of them developed into cenobitic monasteries. In 1474 the Venetian houses formed themselves into a separate body known as the congregation of *St. Michael of Murano*. This house was afterwards reunited to the original branch of the Order whose mother house was always the *Sacro Eremo* at Camaldoli, but it broke off again in 1626, and continued as a purely cenobitic congregation. The congregation of the *Sacro Eremo* went through many difficulties and trials during the succeeding centuries, but it managed to weather every storm which threatened its existence. Within recent years it has taken on a new lease of life.



CAMALDOLESE HERMIT

In addition to the mother house at Camaldoli, there are hermitages at Monte Giove (Fano) and Roquebrune (Fréjus) and a flourishing "alumnate" at Buonsolazzo, near Florence, where boys receive a general education with the idea that some of them may eventually develop a vocation for the solitary life. In 1899 a foundation

was made in the state of Rio Grande (Brazil), but it was abandoned in 1926 as it seemed impossible for the religious to live their eremitical life in that country. Since 1626 the congregation of St. Michael of Murano has had a separate existence as a body of cenobitic monks whose observance differs very little from that of the average Benedictines. Visitors to Rome will be familiar with their famous monastery of San Gregorio on the Coelian Hill.

THE CONGREGATION OF MONTE CORONA

By the end of the fifteenth century all the monasteries of the Camaldolese Order had abandoned the solitary life except the *Sacro Eremo*. No doubt the cause of this was due to the establishment of hermitages near towns and the increasing wealthiness of the Order.

The return to the primitive ideals of St. Romuald is due entirely to one man—Paolo Giustiniani. He was born at Venice in 1476, studied philosophy and theology at Padua, and after a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, abandoned the world and joined the community of the *Sacro Eremo* at Camaldoli. His brilliant intellectual gifts and striking personality caused him to be elected to positions of authority as soon as he was professed. Certain matters had to be dealt with at Rome, and Paolo Giustiniani found himself the agent selected by his community to undertake the mission. It was a difficult task. The abbot of S. Felice at Florence had been spending the revenues of the Order for his own purposes and refused to pay any attention to the

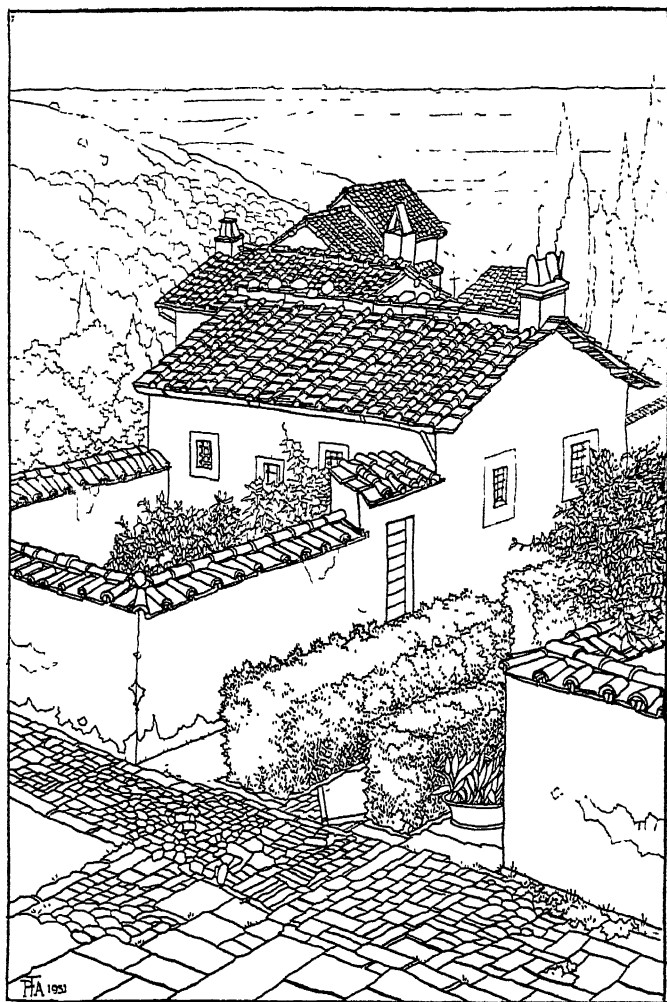
protests of the prior of Camaldoli. So papal protection had to be obtained and in this way Fra Paolo Giustiniani got into touch with Pope Leo X. Three years later he was elected prior. After serving the usual triennial period of office he retired into solitude for three years, when he was again elected to be superior of the Sacro Eremo. But he was not satisfied with the state of affairs at Camaldoli. No doubt he felt that the community was so tied down to centuries-old traditions that it would be impossible to reform its manner of life so as to bring it into line with the observances of the primitive hermits of the time of St. Romuald. Consequently, we find him journeying to Rome, where the Pope eventually gave him his permission to form a new eremitical congregation which would be exempt from the jurisdiction of the General of the Camaldolesi. On his return to the Sacro Eremo, Paolo Giustiniani resigned his office as prior, and, to the intense grief of his subjects, who, judging by contemporary chronicles, were extraordinarily devoted to him, left Camaldoli.

Accompanied by a lay brother he made his way on foot southwards into Umbria, where he took the opportunity to seek the advice of a certain hermit belonging to the Third Order of St. Francis named Fra Tommaso, who was living in solitude on the slopes of Monte Calvo, near Gubbio. Paolo Giustiniani seems to have been in grave doubts as to his true vocation. He wondered if he ought to go to India to live an eremitical life, but Fra Tommaso induced him to remain in Italy, so he set off again into the Apennines, where he discovered a secluded retreat in a lonely valley eight miles from Sassoferrato, where a cave, known as Pascelupo,

afforded him just the kind of hermitage he was seeking. Adjoining the cave was a tiny chapel dedicated to St. Jerome. Two men who had joined him *en route* soon left, unable to stand the rigours of the life, and this one-time Venetian nobleman turned solitary, and remained here alone for some months with no other companion save the faithful lay-brother, Fra Olivo.

But the community of the Sacro Eremo does not seem to have forgotten its late prior, and one day a deputation arrived, begging him to come back and settle nearer Camaldoli. Meanwhile, three members of his old community arrived and asked to join him. Some time after, Pascelupo not being altogether suitable for their growing numbers, Paolo Giustiniani decided to remove to Masaccio, near Cupramontana in the Marches, where there already existed a small hermitage belonging to the Camaldolesi.

On December 9th, 1523, came into being the new congregation of Camaldolesi, to which Paolo Giustiniani gave the name of *The Company of St. Romuald*; autonomous, but dependent on the General of the Order. The following year, 1524, the first general chapter was held in the hermitage of San Benedetto on Monte Conèro, near Ancona, where a definite rule and constitutions were drawn up. At that time, the Company of St. Romuald contained thirty-three members, and possessed ten hermitages. The "*Regola over Institutione eremitica*"—as the new rule was called—was different from the former constitutions of the Camaldolesi, by its great clearness and precision. No startling changes were introduced into the manner of life, but special emphasis is laid on poverty, solitude, and a spirit of penance. Soon after, Pope Clement



SACRO EREMO, FRASCATI

confirmed the new congregation. The remaining years of the life of Fra Paolo Giustiniani were spent in looking after the "Company of St. Romuald." He made several journeys to Rome on business connected with the affairs of the congregation, and died of the plague in 1528 in a hermitage on Monte Soracte, at the age of fifty-two.

Two attempts were made to reunite the "Company of St. Romuald" with the main body of the Camaldolesi, but the unions were not of long duration. In 1667 it was definitely organized into a separate congregation under the title of *Monte Corona*, so called because the hermitage of this name (situated in a picturesque spot in the valley of the Tiber between Perugia and Citta di Castello, not far from Umbertide) had become the "mother house" where the general chapters were held. At that time it was extremely flourishing. There were 334 hermits with eighteen houses in Italy and six in Poland. But the persecutions to which the religious orders in Italy were subjected during the nineteenth century greatly affected the prosperity of the Congregation of Monte Corona and at one time its numbers were reduced to less than a hundred, and many hermitages had to be closed, including that of Monte Corona itself, from which the community was forcibly driven out in 1861. Since that date the mother house has been at Frascati, near Rome.¹

¹ List of hermitages of the Congregation of Monte Corona in 1931, with dates of foundation: (1) Sacro Eremo Tuscolano, Frascati, 1607; (2) Rua (Padua), 1537; (3) Propetto (Naples), 1585; (4) Nola (Naples), 1602; (5) Vico Equense (Naples), 1608; (6) Bielany (Cracow), 1609; (7) Garda (Verona), 1662; (8) Monte S. Genesio (Milan), 1863; (9) Vieja Castilla (Burgos), 1925; (10) Rithuany (Cracow), 1621.

The daily life of a modern hermit of the Congregation of Monte Corona is still sufficiently severe to limit the number of vocations, although the rigours of the observances have been modified considerably since the time of the Blessed Paolo Giustiniani. It is rather difficult to say how they differ from those of the Sacro Eremo, already described in this chapter. Perhaps one might say that the whole spirit of this congregation is essentially "Counter-Reformation" and bears somewhat the same relation to the older original Congregation of Camaldoli as do the Capuchins to the Leonine Friars Minor, or, in a lesser degree, as do the Cistercians to the Black Benedictines. Both the constitutions as well as the actual life of the Monte Corona Camaldolese



CAMALDOLESE HERMIT OF
MONTE CORONA

seem to lay great stress on the fact that they are a *reform* and that their spirit and rule are much more severe than those of the older (and unreformed) branch.

They impress the visitor as having retained much less of the medieval Benedictine spirit than has been preserved at the Sacro Eremo of Camaldoli. Their spirituality as well as their rule would seem to belong rather to the age of baroque architecture; in other words, to the seventeenth century. To the student

of monastic history the Congregation is an interesting study as showing how the seventeenth-century Italian temperament adapted the eremitical life to suit the conditions of its age. The congregation can also be compared with the Capuchins, who, in the words of Father Cuthbert, O.S.F.C., "were a rare instance of an old institution re-born into a new time and becoming one spiritually and mentally with the time. . . ." (*The Capuchins*, Vol. II, p. 429.)

The typical hermitage of the Monte Corona congregation does not greatly differ from the Sacro Eremo at Camaldoli described a few pages back. There is the same walled enclosure to which women are forbidden; the cells of the hermits are arranged in rows, divided by stone-paved paths. There is the church, surrounded by a group of buildings containing the refectory, library, infirmary, guest-house, and the quarters for the lay-brothers. But there are certain distinct characteristics not found at Camaldoli. The cells are smaller, the walls of their gardens higher. The churches are not arranged like those of the Benedictines, but follow the normal plan of nearly every post-Reformation Order, with a small choir behind the High Altar, and completely cut off from the nave. In the nave itself are two rows of *prie-dieux*, at which the hermits kneel during their times for mental prayer—a small matter, perhaps, but significant as showing the importance attached to mental prayer and meditation as compared with the Divine Office itself. The Office is always monotoned; not even on the greater feasts is it sung in the churches of the Monte Corona congregation. Only twice a year is High Mass celebrated—on the Vigil of Pentecost and Holy Saturday.

On other days, including all Sundays and feast-days, the Conventual Mass is always a Low Mass. There is no other order in the Catholic Church which observes such an almost puritanical austerity in the externals of its worship.

The following is the normal "horarium" observed in all the houses of this congregation.

Half an hour after midnight the bell rings for Matins and Lauds. On their return to their cells about two o'clock the hermits can sleep until six o'clock when they meet again for Prime, followed by half an hour's meditation and Low Masses. Then they take a cup of coffee and some dry bread for breakfast, and until 8.30 or 9 a.m., when they assemble in church for Tierce, Conventual Mass, and Sext, remain in their cells. The rest of the morning is devoted to study. Nones is recited at 11.30, followed by dinner at midday. They eat in the refectory about twelve times a year, on other days in their cells. Except in cases of illness, flesh meat is never allowed. The normal diet of the hermits consists of eggs, milk, fish, vegetables, fruit, and cheese, with wine as drink.

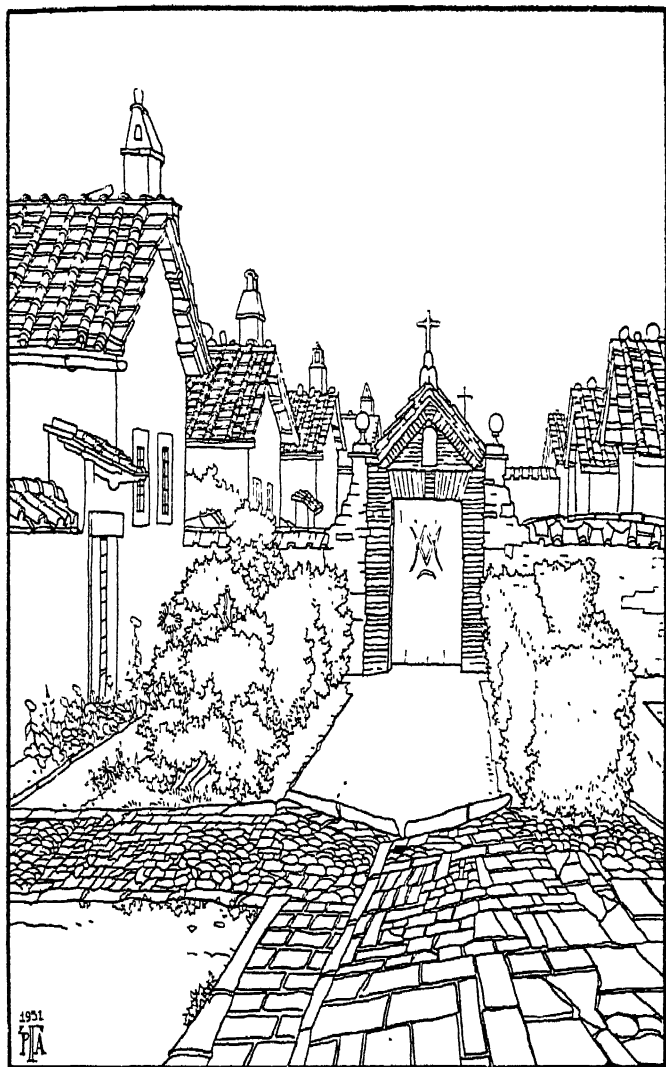
After dinner there is a certain time allowed for recreation. During summer a short siesta is taken. Vespers are said about three hours before sunset, varying naturally according to the time of the year. On certain days the hermits are allowed to go for a walk after Vespers. Compline follows about two hours later, preceded by spiritual reading in common, and concluding with the recitation of the Rosary. After this the religious return to their respective cells, have supper (never more than a very frugal repast), and

an hour or two later retire to bed. The sketch on page 97 gives an idea of the habit worn by members of the Monte Corona Congregation, which is white. Unlike their brethren of the Sacro Eremo, they do not wear shoes, but heavy wooden clogs. In choir they wear cloaks, fastened with a piece of wood, instead of cowls.

No better description of the Sacro Eremo at Frascati (the mother house of the congregation) can be given than that written by Cardinal Wiseman in his *Recollections of the Last Four Popes* (pp. 118-120):

“Just where the vineyards touch the woods, as if to adorn both, there lies nestling what you would take to be a very neat and regular village. A row of houses, equidistant and symmetrical, united by a continuous dwarf wall, and a church with its towers in the midst, all of dazzling whiteness, offer no other suggestion. The sight certainly would deceive one; but not so the ears. There is a bell that knows no sleeping. The peasant hears it as he rises at daybreak to proceed to his early toil, the vine-dresser may direct every pause for refreshment by its unfailing regularity through the day; the horseman returning home at evening uncovers himself as it rings forth the ‘Ave’; and the muleteer singing on the first of his string of mules, carrying wine to Rome, is glad at midnight to catch its solemn peal as it mingles with the tinkle of his own drowsy bells. Such an unceasing call to prayer and praise can be answered, not by monks nor by friars, but only by anchorites.

“And to such does this sweet abode belong. A nearer approach does not belie the distant aspect. It is as neat, as regular, as clean, and as tranquil as it looks.



SACRO EREMO, FRASCATI

It is truly a village divided by streets, in each of which are rows of houses exactly symmetrical. A small sitting-room, a sleeping-cell, a chapel completely fitted up, in case of illness, and a wood and lumber room, compose the cottage. This is approached by a garden, which the occupant tills, but only for flowers, assisted by his own fountain abundantly supplied. While singing None in choir, the day's only meal is deposited in a little locker within the door of the cell, for each one's solitary refecton. On a few great festivals they dine together; but not even the Pope, at his frequent visits, has meat placed before him. Everything, as has been said, is scrupulously clean. The houses inside and out, the well-furnished library, the strangers' apartments (for hospitality is freely given), and still more the church, are faultless in this respect. And so are the venerable men who stand in choir, and whose noble voices sustain the church's magnificent psalmody, with unwavering slowness of intonation. They are clad in white from head to foot; their thick woollen drapery falling in large folds; and the shaven head, but flowing beard, the calm features, the down-cast eyes, and often venerable aspect, make every one a picture, as solemn as Zurbaran ever painted, but without the sternness which he sometimes imparts to his recluses. They pass out of the church, to return home, all silent and unnoticing; but the guest-master will tell you who they are. I remember but a few. This is a native of Turin, who was a general in Napoleon's army, fought many battles, and has hung up his sword beside the altar, to take down in its place the sword of the spirit, and fight the good fight within. The next is an eminent musician, who has discovered the

hollowness of human applause, and has unstrung his earthly harp, and taken up 'the lyre of the Levite,' to join his strains to those of angels. Another comes 'curved like a bride's arch,' as Dante says, and leaning on a younger arm, as he totters forward; one whose years are ninety, of which seventy have been spent in seclusion, except a few of dispersion, but in peace; for he refuses any relaxation from his duties. Then follows a fourth, belonging to one of the noblest Roman families, who yet prefers his cottage and his lentil to the palace and the banquet."

Besides the three congregations of Camaldolese already mentioned, there have been two others, both of which are now suppressed, viz. *Turin* in Italy, and *Notre Dame de Consolation* in France.

The former was founded by Alessandro Ceva, who was a disciple of St. Philip Neri. He joined the Order and was elected prior-general in 1587. In 1596 he was made prior of the Camaldolese hermitage near Turin, and soon afterwards the houses of the Order in Piedmont became a separate congregation. It was re-absorbed into the congregation of Monte Corona in the eighteenth century.

The congregation of Notre Dame de Consolation owes its existence to Boniface d'Antoine, priest of the archdiocese of Lyons, who, having made his profession in the congregation of Turin, returned to France to solicit help from Louis XIII for the foundation of a Camaldolese hermitage in that country. The first to be built was at Bothéon in the archdiocese of Lyons and was dedicated to Notre Dame de Consolation. Other foundations soon followed and the congregation spread rapidly, and was formally approved by Pope

Urban VIII in 1634. They observed the constitutions of Monte Corona to which they were affiliated. Among the more important houses were *Gros Bois* (near Paris, 1642; *La Flotte* (Vendôme), 1648; *La Cavalerie* (Bessé), 1659; *Rogat* (Congart, Brittany), 1674; *Ile Chauve* (Poitou), 1679.

In 1671 the small eremitical congregation of *Mont Valérien*, near Paris (see Chapter VIII) joined them. During the eighteenth century the French Camaldolesi became so infected with the Jansenist heresy that they were suppressed in 1770. There are also Camaldolese nuns who, although their rule of life is cenobitic in character, have sometimes allowed their subjects to live as solitaries.

"The Camaldolesi," writes Mr. Montgomery Carmichael in *The Solitaries of the Sambuca*, "are worthy of our infinite respect and veneration. They are *par excellence* the Hermits of the West. Just as St. Benedict was the Father of the Monks of the West, so was St. Romuald of the Hermits of the West. They have fallen on evil times, and are without the means to live their very peculiar life in its perfection. . . . I have no words to express my veneration for the noble impressive figure of Blessed Paolo Giustiniani, one of the most remarkable figures of the Renaissance, and a great scholar and a humble saint. . . . It is little short of miraculous and a sign of great hope that he should still, in this year of grace, have more than two hundred followers living the eremitical life. . . ."

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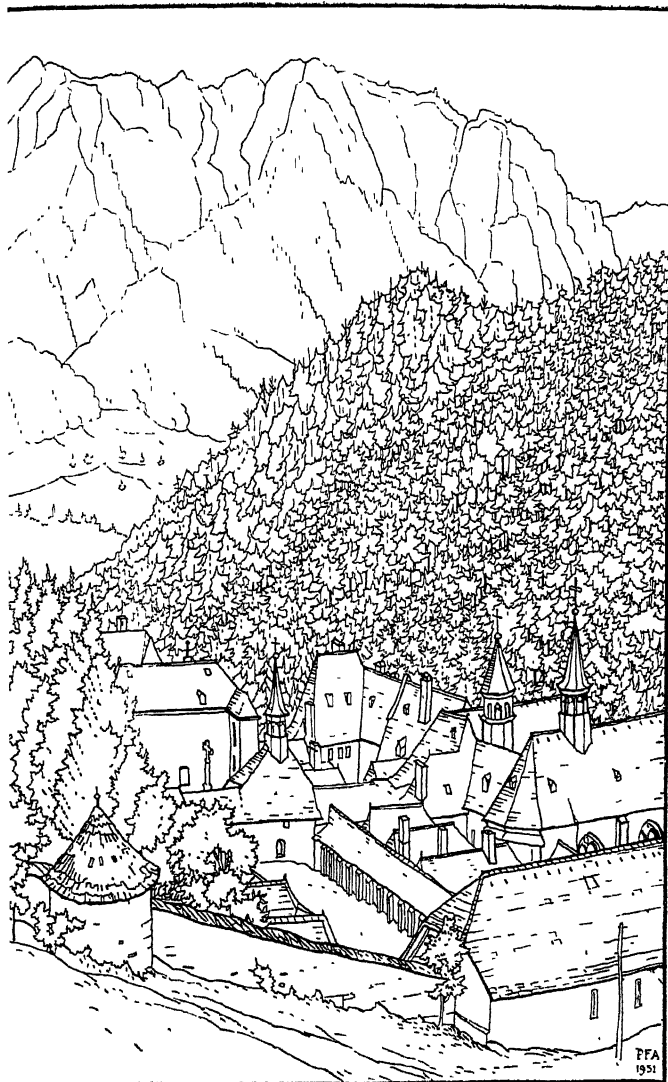
CHAPTER V

CARTHUSIAN SOLITARIES

MANY people think that the Carthusian Order actually grew out of the Benedictine Order, but this is scarcely true to fact, for apart from the adoption of the Benedictine arrangement of the Psalter and the Benedictine vow of stability (i.e. attachment to the monastery in which profession has been made), there is very little else that was borrowed from the Benedictine Rule, when drawing up the original Carthusian *consuetudines*, despite the affirmation of Prior Guigo I to the contrary. However, St. Bruno himself, as will be told later, must have had some actual experience of Benedictine eremitical life during his sojourn at Sèche-Fontaine, and it is not improbable that he may have come into touch with the hermits at Camaldoli and Vallombrosa in Italy, both of which communities followed the Rule of St. Benedict. We have no definite record of this, however, despite the fact that Carthusians have much in common with the Camaldolese solitaries, whose life is described in the last chapter—severe discipline of fasts and abstinences, silence and seclusion, residence in separate houses or cells, and definitely organized lay brothers.

The founder of the Carthusian Order was born at Cologne about the year 1030. He belonged to the noble family of Hartefaust. His earlier education was received at the collegiate school attached to the

church of St. Cunibert, and completed at Rheims. In 1055 he returned to Cologne, on finishing his theological studies, and received Holy Orders. But he did not remain long at Cologne, having been recalled to Rheims by the archbishop, who soon appointed him rector of the cathedral schools. In 1057 he became prebend of the cathedral, later on being put in charge of the schools. But Bruno felt the world was not for him. He yearned for the life of the cloister. In the midst of all his outward occupations at Rheims we are told that inwardly he led the simple life of a monk, and that he seemed to be awaiting a sign from God to release him from the multitude of worldly cares of his office. In fact, he had, together with two canons of Rheims, Fulk le Borgne and Raoul le Verd, vowed to enter the religious state. But Fulk was sent to Rome on diocesan business, and Raoul's enthusiasm grew cold. Then troubles arose at Rheims owing to the simoniacal appointment of Manasses de Gournay to the see after the death of Archbishop Gervais in 1067. The Pope intervened, Manasses promised to use the revenues of his diocese for proper purposes, and the canons made their submission to him, but Bruno resigned his post, and decided to return to Cologne. Further complications arose; Manasses was deposed; the see was vacant; the papal legate wanted to make Bruno archbishop, but Helinand, bishop of Laon, was elected, a man as unfitted for this important post as had been Manasses. Bruno felt he could stand Rheims and its worldliness no longer. So, accompanied by a few companions, he made his way to Molèsmes, where a few years previously St. Robert had founded a community of hermits who followed the Rule of



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LA GRANDE CHARTREUSE

St. Benedict, and which was later on to become the nucleus of the Cistercian Order. Bruno and his followers remained some years at Molèsmes, but eventually left for a more secluded spot, called Sèche-Fontaine, where, so far as we know, they adopted a kind of eremitical life based on that of the Egyptian desert. In 1084 we find him, with six companions, setting out on the road to Grenoble, where he intended to ask St. Hugh, bishop of that diocese, and one of Bruno's former pupils, for a suitable place in which to build a hermitage in the wild and inaccessible mountains of Savoy. St. Hugh gave them an affectionate welcome, having had a dream in which he saw a building being erected in a lonely place by unseen hands, whither he had been directed by seven stars. Perhaps St. Hugh had already visited the "lonely place" he had seen in his dream. The site of the present monastery of La Grande Chartreuse at that time was little more than an Alpine eyrie lost among the dark pine-clad mountains, covered in perpetual snow from November to April; a wilderness where wild animals had their lairs, a place unfitted for normal human habitation. There were no roads, only a few narrow and treacherous footpaths leading perilously near yawning precipices. In the winter there was the danger of avalanches. St. Hugh pointed out all these disadvantages to St. Bruno, but his description of the place made the latter all the more enthusiastic.

"The way which Bishop Hugh led the new candidates for the eremitic life was northwards from Grenoble towards the Alps," writes Miss E. M. Thompson (*The Carthusian Order in England*, p. 8), "according to tradition, along Corenc, by the Col de Porte towards

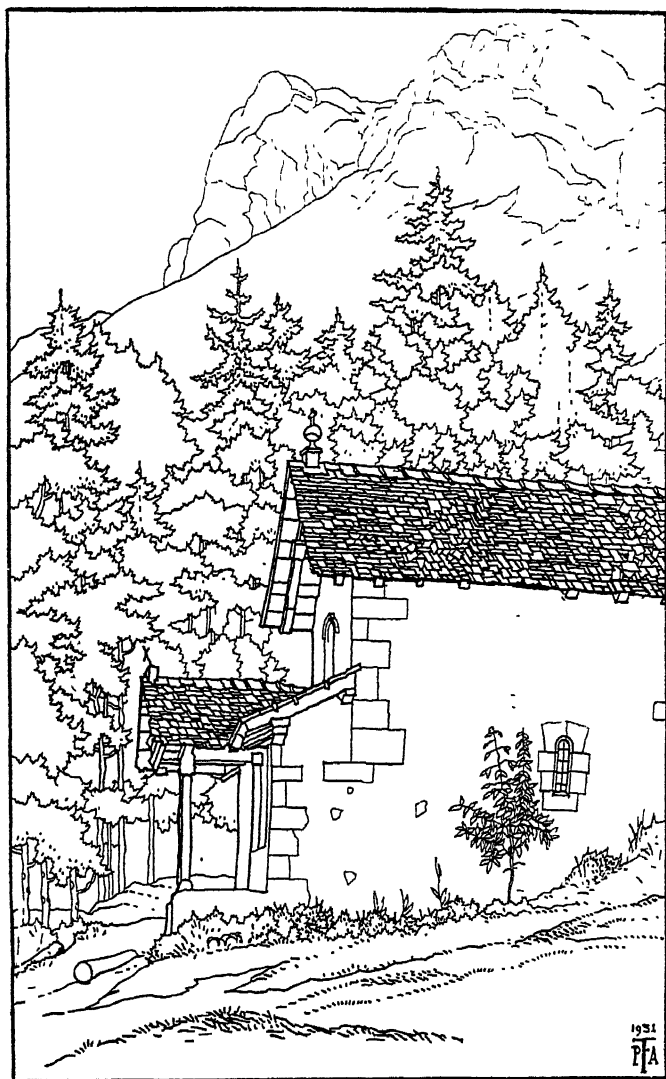
La Cluse. Where, in the long ascent, Bruno and his guide rested by a rock, later was erected a chapel bearing Hugh's name. After passing the stream of Guiersmort and climbing a steep mountain-side they arrived at a plateau surrounded by barren rocks and sombre fir-trees, the valleys of the Rhône and Isère being visible through the narrow defiles. Here at 3,136 feet above sea-level they built themselves wooden huts at a little distance apart, one hut for two men, and a chapel of solid masonry."

The modern pilgrim to La Grande Chartreuse finds it rather difficult to recapture the spirit of these once-isolated valleys overshadowed by their precipitous rocky cliffs, and to visualize them as they existed in the time of St. Bruno. Previous to the advent of the now ubiquitous motor car the place was indeed difficult of access, but at the present time one can rush up from Grenoble to the Grande Chartreuse, and back again, between breakfast and lunch. During the summer months the vast monastery, which has stood empty since the rightful owners were driven out by the French Government about thirty years ago, is invaded from morning to night by hundreds, if not thousands, of trippers and tourists who are conducted round the buildings by uniformed guides belonging to the Ministry of the Fine Arts. The once silent cloisters and the little hermitages, and the church, now dusty and dirty, are filled with chattering and giggling crowds of both sexes, for whom the quest of solitude has no message, and who do not understand its significance. They dutifully inspect this monument of "exploded superstition"—their guide-books tell them it is one of the local "sights" which must not be omitted from their

programme—they buy a few picture-postcards, drink a “St. Bruno cocktail,” and rush off again in their cars and charabancs. Such is the usual way of making a pilgrimage to the Grande Chartreuse in these days.

But if the pilgrim can spare a little more time, if he really desires to absorb a little of the spirit of that tiny band of solitaries who made this place their home nine hundred years ago, he should not leave the Grande Chartreuse without climbing up the steep road that leads on into the forest from the monastery, and which, after half an hour or so, arrives at the chapel of Notre Dame de Casalibus—Our Lady of the Huts—built on the site of the oratory set up by the first Carthusians in June 1084. A narrow valley, enclosed on every side by towering rocks, is all the view he has, the sky being only visible through the dark green of the tall pine-trees. A few yards farther on he comes to a fountain, whose origin is attributed to the prayers of St. Bruno. Immediately above, perched on an enormous boulder—the relic of some prehistoric glacier—stands a small chapel dedicated to the saint himself. Here was the actual cell in which he lived, the rude huts of his followers being at some distance off, surrounding the chapel of Notre Dame de Casalibus.

One is absolutely alone. One may sit here on a summer’s afternoon for many hours and be quite undisturbed by the presence of any other human being, save perhaps, very rarely, a passing woodman or charcoal-burner. No sound greets the ear, other than the soft murmur of the breeze in the lofty pine-trees, and the song of the birds. So absolute is the solitude in these dark forests that clothe the upper part of the valley beyond the Grande Chartreuse that the most

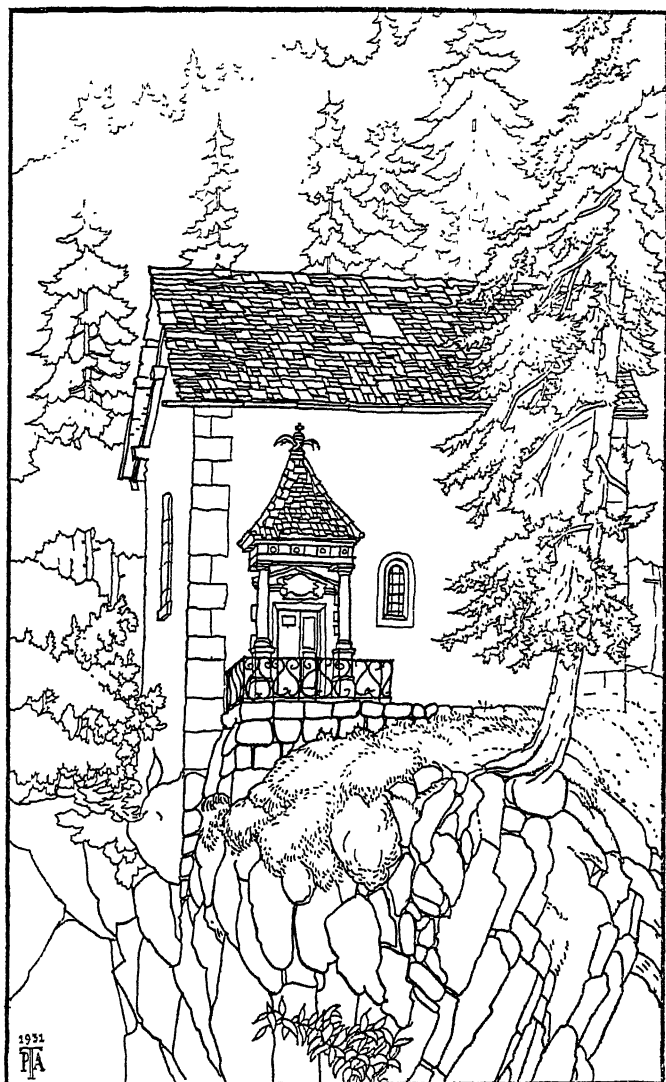


NOTRE DAME DE CASALIBUS, LA GRANDE CHARTREUSE

prosaic-minded pilgrim would have little or no difficulty in visualizing the surroundings as they existed in the time of St. Bruno.

But St. Bruno himself did not remain in this secluded retreat more than five years. In 1090 he was summoned to Rome by his old pupil, Otto de Lagery, who had become Pope Urban II. His counsel and advice were needed in the government of the Church: "*ut eum dirigeret et adjuvaret ad Apostolatus sollicitudinem et onera perferenda*"—a proof of the high respect the Pope had of his former master. To obey the command meant the abandonment of what was most dear to Bruno, but he did not hesitate, despite the grief and the protests of his companions, who declared they could not remain at the Grande Chartreuse without him. He set out for Rome, accompanied by most of the community, where on their arrival they were given quarters in the ruins of the baths of Diocletian, where now stands the church of S. Maria degli Angeli. But Rome was no place in which to lead the solitary life, and, after a year or so, some of the hermits returned to their cells at Notre Dame de Casalibus, which had been handed over to the abbot of Chaise-Dieu, a neighbouring monastery.

But a few of his companions remained in Rome with St. Bruno. He managed with difficulty to escape being made bishop of Reggio, and at last the Pope acceded to his request to be allowed to return to solitude, but only on the condition that he established himself within reasonable distance of the Papal Court, ready for summons, should his help and counsel be needed. At last a suitable refuge was found on the estate of Count Roger of Sicily and Calabria, a spot



CHAPEL OF ST. BRUNO, GRANDE CHARTREUSE

utterly different in every way, save in isolation, from the dark gloomy valley in which the Grande Chartreuse is situated. Here, at La Torre in the heart of Calabria, in a setting of chestnut woods, cornfields, and mountains, a spot that has none of the forbidding severity of Dauphiné, St. Bruno and his fellow-solitaries built a few cells after the model of the Chartreuse, while a mile or two below another monastery was built, where both monks and lay-brothers leading the cenobitic life were installed under Blessed Lanuin.¹ In founding this other monastery, San Stefano, St. Bruno may have been influenced by what he had seen or heard of Camaldoli, where, as we have already stated, St. Romuald had built a hospice for pilgrims and weaker monks unable to stand the rigours of the solitary life at the Sacro Eremo. No more suitable district could have been found than Calabria for this the first Italian *certosa*, for the Greek tenth-century hermit St. Nilus, founder of the abbey of Grotteferrata, near Rome, had lived in the neighbourhood, and another monastery, that of San Giacomo, also given by Count Roger to St. Bruno, had been inhabited by Greek monks. The saint never returned to the Grande Chartreuse, and spent the last remaining years of his life at La Torre, where he died on October 16th, 1101, at the age of sixty-six.

St. Bruno had never drawn up a written rule and it would seem that he had no intention of founding an Order. For some years after his death his followers called themselves "Christ's poor men," and, at the heading of a letter addressed to the monks of Cluny,

¹ Not to be confused with Prior Landuin, Bruno's successor at the Grand Chartreuse.

they describe themselves as "Christ's poor men who dwell in the desert of the Chartreuse for love of the Name of Jesus."

An interesting description of life at the Grande Chartreuse during the twelfth century has been given us by Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, who visited the place when Guigo I was prior, before the first constitutions had been drawn up. The latter has often been called the "Second Patriarch of the Carthusians," for under his wise leadership the Order increased so rapidly that six other Charterhouses were founded in France between the years 1115 and 1117. The abbot of Cluny informs us that besides the prior, there were twelve monks and eighteen lay-brothers then residing at the Grande Chartreuse, also a few hired servants. "To tame the beast (*jumentum*) of their body," he writes, "and to subdue the law of their members, they always chafe their flesh with harsh hair shirts, and afflict, emaciate, and dry up their bodies with continual and severe fasts. Hence they always use bread made with bran, and wine so watered that it deserves not to be called wine. The whole and the sick also abstain for ever from eating flesh. Fish they never buy, but accept when by chance it is given in charity."

Only on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays were they allowed cheese or eggs. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday they had to be content with bread and water. "All of them," the writer continues, "in the manner of the Egyptian monks inhabit separate cells perpetually, where in silence, reading, and prayer, and manual labour, they pass their existence. In these same cells they perform the duty to God of the regular

hours, that is, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Compline, being warned by the church bell. For Vespers and Matins they all meet together in church. . . . On the festal days they eat twice, and then in the manner of monks, living not in their cells, but together; and not only do they sing all the regular hours in church, but also after Sext and after Vespers, they eat together in the refectory, no one in good health being excepted. . . . On the days on which vegetable food is allowed to them, they prepare and cook it for themselves according to measure, this being a precept of the eremitical institution, when they do not have a meal in common in the refectory but alone in their cells. Wine at no time do they take before or after table. He who is thirsty may drink water between meals." (Peter the Venerable, *De Miraculis*, lib. ii. c. 28. Quoted by E. M. Thompson, *The Carthusian Order in England*, pp. 16-17.)

The first *consuetudines* or customs for use of the solitaries at the Grande Chartreuse and the other Carthusian foundations, which had since been instituted, were drawn up about 1128 by Prior Guigo. In the prologue he modestly states that he had shrunk from the task for many years because he believed that "either in the letters of St. Jerome or in the Rule of St. Benedict, or in other authentic writings," could be found almost everything for the ordering of the daily life of the hermits of La Chartreuse.

Lack of space forbids any detailed examination of these "customs," but a few words as to the actual surroundings in which the twelfth-century Carthusians lived thirty years after the death of St. Bruno may be of interest.

"As to his cell, in which the greater part of his life was to be spent, the customs do not show that at this period it was divided into small apartments as was the case afterwards; its furniture and the utensils and clothes allowed to him were such as belonged to poverty and humility. For his bed he had straw, a felt cloth, a cushion, a covering of coarsest sheepskin, and a coverlet of rustic cloth. His wardrobe consisted of two hair shirts, two tunics, two 'pilches,' one worse and one better, likewise two cowls, three pair of breeches (*caligarum*),¹ four pairs of socks, skins, a hood (*cappa*),² shoes for night and day, a grease to smear them, two loin-cloths³ and a girdle, all of coarse hemp, and he was not to care about the texture, colour, or coarseness of the things, whether for the bed or for his personal wear."

For the repair of his garments he had two needles, thread, and scissors, and, as well as a comb "for his head," a razor with a grindstone and thong of leather for sharpening it. Since he would have to do his own cooking and to eat at home as a rule, there were also allowed a few necessary pots and pans and platters, with provision for fire and an axe for chopping wood. "Let not him who reads this," says Guigo, "either laugh or reprove us, unless he have perchance lived in a cell for a longer time amid such snow and horrible cold." Means of manual occupation were also supplied;

¹ More correctly stockings which are footless and need the addition of socks to complete the leg gear, just like a bishop's buskins and sandals. Breeches, although worn by the modern Carthusians, have not found their way into the Statutes, even in their recent revision.—P. F. A.

² More correctly the black cloak used for travelling.

³ The Latin word is *lumbaria*, which here means ropes going round the waist to hold the hair shirt in position.

“for writing, a desk, pens, chalk, two pumices, two ink-horns, a scalpel (for scraping the parchment) two knives or razors, a pointer (*punctorium*),¹ an awl, lead rule,² a ruler, tablets, and a pencil³; if he could not write he was taught how to do so, or if that was



CARTHUSIAN

CARTHUSIAN LAY BROTHER

impossible, the tools of whatever art or craft which he knew were given to him. Further, he received two books to read from the convent aumbrey, and was bidden take care that they were not soiled with smoke

¹ A punch for making larger holes than an awl.

² More correctly “lead,” i.e. the weight which hung by a cord over the desk, holding the parchment taut and in position when writing.

³ More correctly a writing-stylus.

or dust or other dirt. . . . The solitary was not to make excuses for leaving his cell at other than the appointed times, for he should consider it as necessary to his health and life as water is to fishes or the sheep-cote to sheep. Should he however lack bread, wine, water, or fire, through his own or another's neglect, or should he hear an unwonted noise, or clamour, or if there was danger of fire, he might come out to get what was required or give or seek help, or even break silence, if the greatness of the peril demanded it." ¹

It is interesting to compare the regulations concerning food and drink allowed to the solitaries by first customs, with the manner of living Peter the Venerable had described some time earlier. They were allowed bread (not of the finest white flour) and salt on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday; on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday vegetable soup which they cooked themselves, wine and cheese. At supper or dinner (on the fast-days on which they ate only one meal), they had raw herbs or fruit, if there were any. Remnants of bread were returned to the kitchen on Saturdays, also what was left over of any cooked dishes. When they were in the refectory on Sundays and feast-days, cheese was added to the vegetarian dishes, also fruit. In Advent both eggs and cheese were forbidden. But this rigid dietary was modified when they were "bled." "Bleeding" was a regular institution, and took place five times a year for those to whom it was considered necessary. The "cautery" was the only other medical remedy. Those monks who had been bled were allowed two meals on three successive days, the food

¹ E. M. Thompson, *The Carthusian Order in England*, p. 35.

being of a better quality. They were likewise permitted to talk a little and drink wine. On these three days they remained in bed in the morning, and on two of them were even given three eggs for supper. Shaving took place six times a year, the "operation" being performed by the monks for each other.

Many other instances might be quoted to show the care given to the sick and infirm, which was, and is to-day, such a characteristic feature of the Carthusian spirit. If space allowed, one could write at length on other details of these interesting customs of Prior Guigo which enable the reader to form such a vivid idea of the daily life of the twelfth-century Carthusians, not only of the external details of their life, but in its inner and spiritual aspect.

In the second chapter of Miss Thompson's authoritative work, *The Carthusian Order in England*, from which we have already quoted so many passages, will be found some thirty pages devoted to the customs of Prior Guigo I; of interest not only for their own sake, but as descriptive of the eremitical life introduced by Henry II into England when he settled a colony of Carthusians at Witham in the diocese of Wells in 1178.

To give anything like an adequate account of the Carthusian Order during the nine hundred years of its history would take many pages. The number of houses increased from two at the close of the eleventh century to thirty-three a hundred years later. The highest number of Charterhouses was reached with one hundred and ninety in the fifteenth century, dwindling to thirty-six at the close of the eighteenth century. To-day, since the expulsion of the religious

orders from France, there remain only seventeen Carthusian houses in the world.¹

In medieval times nine Charterhouses were founded in England: Witham (1178), Hinton (1227), Beauvale (1343), London (1349), Hull (1378), Coventry (1381), Axholme (1397), Mount Grace (1398), and Sheen (1415). In Scotland only one foundation was made, Perth (1430).

All of them were suppressed at the Reformation, the revenues appropriated, the communities turned out, and eighteen of their number martyred. Sheen Charterhouse was reopened during the reign of Queen Mary, but on the accession of Elizabeth the monastery was again suppressed. Some of the community sought refuge in Flanders, where, after staying for a while with their brethren at Bruges, they eventually migrated to Nieuport. Here they lived in a home of their own until the monastery was closed by the Emperor Joseph II in 1783, by the general edict which affected all religious houses in his dominions. The last surviving prior of the English Carthusian province, Prior Joseph Williams, died as a refugee in his native land in 1797; the line was finally extinguished with the death of Dom Bruno Finch at Fernyhalgh in Lincolnshire in 1810. In 1873 some French Carthusians made

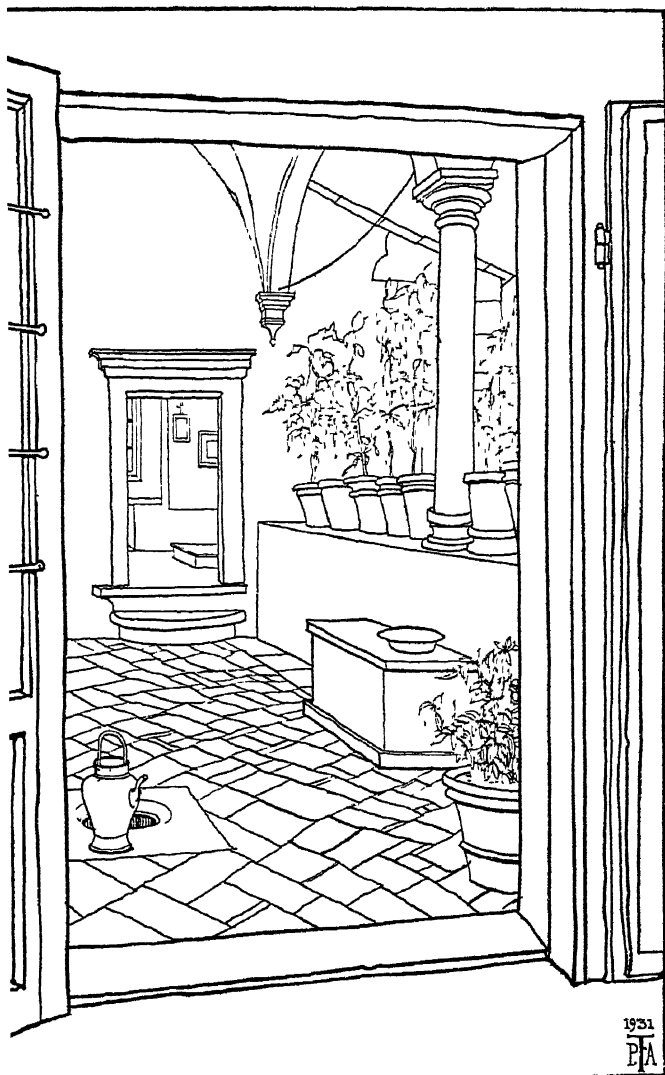
¹ IN ITALY: (Community of the Grande Chartreuse) Certosa di Farneta; *Rome*, Residence of the Procurator-General; *Florence*, Certosa di Galluzzo; *Pisa*, Certosa di Calci; *La Torre* (Tomb of St. Bruno), Serra San Bruno, Catanzaro, Calabria; *Vedana*, Mas, Belluno; *Trisulti*, Colleparado. IN SPAIN: *Miraflores*, Burgos; *Montalegre*, Mongat, Barcelona; *Aula Dei*, Villanueva de Gallego, Zaragoza. IN SWITZERLAND: *La Valsainte*, par Cerniat, Fribourg. GERMANY: *Hain*, Düsseldorf-Unterrath. ENGLAND: *Parkminster*, Partridge Green, Sussex. JUGOSLAVIA, *Pleterje*, St. Jernej, Kransjsko. FRANCE: *Selignac*, Ain; *Montriéux*, Var. TEMPORARY HOSPICES: *La Cervara*, S. Margherita-Ligure, Genoa, Italy; *Tarragona*.

a foundation not far from Horsham, building a vast monastery dedicated to St. Hugh of Lincoln. It is one of the largest houses of the Order, and its lofty spire is a conspicuous landmark all over the Weald of Sussex. This is the only place in England where one finds the organized eremitic life in community being lived to-day.

To come now to the actual life of a modern Carthusian. His home is generally referred to as a "cell," but as a matter of fact, it is really a small self-contained house or cottage. The cells of all Charterhouses have a certain family resemblance one to another, though the individual disposition differs locally. The Italian *certose*, for instance, differ very considerably from those of other countries. In some of them the cells are rather like small flats, with no separate gardens in which the hermit-monk can take exercise. In others they might be described as picturesque villas, with their open loggias and paved courtyards. And in the three Spanish Charterhouses the cells are all different one from the other.

The typical Carthusian cell, such as one finds in France, where before the expulsion thirty years ago the Order was most numerous, consists of a short corridor, entered from the main cloister, in which the occupant can get exercise when it is wet. The lower story of the cottage is divided up into two rooms, one part serving as a wood-store, the other as a workshop, in which one generally finds a carpenter's bench and tools for gardening and other manual work.

A flight of stone steps leads up from the corridor to the living-rooms. The first of these is no more than a sort of ante-chamber, and does not serve any



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CARTHUSIAN CELL, CERTOSA DI FIRENZE

particular purpose. The inner room is the *cell*, properly so called. Here it is that the Carthusian spends most of his solitary life. Beneath the window, looking out over the garden, a knee-hole table is fixed, at which the monk takes his meals. On a wall beside the window is a bookshelf containing a small collection of theological and other works which may be added to from the monastery library.

The wall opposite the window is divided by wooden partitions into three unequal spaces. At one end in an alcove is the "oratory," a stall and kneeling-desk where the solitary recites those parts of the Divine Office that are not sung in church. During this devotion he performs exactly the same external ceremonies as he would in choir with the rest of the community. A crucifix, a few images, and one or two pictures are hung on the walls of the oratory. The middle space is taken up by the bed, which during the day is shut off by curtains. A straw mattress, a chaff pillow, and woollen blankets constitute the bedding. At the other end a door leads into a lavatory. Until the war Carthusians had managed to resist the introduction of electric light into their monasteries, and depended on oil lamps for artificial illumination. But petroleum then became so expensive or almost unobtainable that a less primitive form of lighting had to be adopted. Up to the present five Charterhouses have stood out against the change!

The present-day Carthusian monk is aroused from his sleep at 10.30 or 11 p.m., according to whether it be a "feast" or a "feria," by the sound of a bell inside his cell—rung by a monk whose duty it is to awaken the community. A Carthusian does not take long to

dress, for he sleeps in his underclothing, covered by a light night-cowl. He makes the sign of the Cross, kisses his crucifix, takes the little lamp which has already been lit by the caller, and goes to his oratory. He recites a few private prayers, then says Matins and Lauds of the Little Office of Our Lady, followed by some special intercessions for the deliverance of the Holy Land. In 1215 the Council of the Lateran ordered the Psalm lxxviii, *Deus venerunt gentes*, to be said for this intention during Mass, before the *Agnus Dei*. The Carthusians have ever since obeyed this injunction but have transferred the prayers from their original position in the Canon of the Mass to after the Night Office of Our Lady. It is uncertain exactly when the Carthusians introduced the obligatory recitation of the Little Office of Our Lady. Most authorities agree that the practice dates to Prior Landuin, who was St. Bruno's successor at the Grande Chartreuse.

Should any time be left over after these prayers have been recited, the monk remains kneeling at the *prie-dieu* in his oratory, awaiting the sound of the bell which is to summon him to church for the long canonical office of Matins and Lauds. He lights a small oil lantern of peculiar construction and shape, puts out his reading-lamp, and on the first stroke of the bell from the distant church, opens the door of his cell and makes his way along the cloister. The flickering light of the lantern he is carrying casts weird shadows on the walls and pavement. Other white-garbed monks, with their hoods up, each carrying a similar lantern, come out from their cells, and follow each other in the same direction. Save for the tolling of the bell and the tramp of heavy shoes on the stone

pavement, all is silent. The flickering and smoking oil lamps give out a curious and never-to-be-forgotten smell. Each father, as he enters the church, makes a profound bow to the High Altar (not a genuflection), gives a pull at the bell-rope and hands it to the monk following him. The choir-stalls soon fill up; the professed monks in their white habits; the novices in their black cloaks, which entirely envelop them. The church is in almost total darkness, the only light coming from the candles on the High Altar, and the carefully shaded lamps behind the choir-stalls, which cast all their light on to the massive leather-bound and brass-clamped Psalters and other books used in the Office—one volume being used by two monks. After a deep silence the "hebdomadary priest" for the week intones the *Deus in adjutorium* and the mingled voices of the fathers take up the reply, *Domine ad adjuvandum me festina*. The voices sound full and sonorous (perhaps a trifle harsh and unpolished to those accustomed to the more "refined" plain-chant of the Benedictines). Moreover, there is no instrumental accompaniment, and the singing seems very slow. To some ears it might seem to have a tendency to go flat. No singer would be likely to feel at his best when summoned from bed at midnight after some four hours' sleep, to sing without accompaniment.

Visitors of an emotional tendency are inclined to become ecstatic about the "truly monastic gravity of the Carthusian chant . . . carrying its cadences soaring to God, then sinking down to lowly supplication . . . almost breaking into sobbing of repentance, or pouring itself out in heartfelt whispers of love," but as a matter of fact these romantic descriptions are not quite true

to facts. In reality the monk himself in choir—especially if he happens to be musical—may get very little *æsthetic* pleasure out of the singing of the Office.

“Now and again,” a traveller has written, after a visit to a Carthusian monastery, “the lights go out, or are shaded, and then there is naught but the sanctuary lamp to shed its twinkling light athwart the darkness. One can only see vague outlines of forms in the choir; you would say that they were ghosts, fast fixed to the surface of the wall. . . . All this stirs you to the depths of your soul, and even the most indifferent feel a shudder pass through them, that has in it something of religion.”

Quite so! Such may be the romantic emotions in the mind of the passing visitor who rather enjoys the unaccustomed thrill of getting up in the middle of the night to spend two hours in a dark church, with perhaps the moon casting its pale beams through a window and the ruby glimmer of the sanctuary lamp reflected on the polished marble or wood of the floor. But the Carthusian himself soon ceases to notice these external details. Perhaps he may not be feeling particularly well—he may have a headache—a cold—yet unless he is actually seriously ill he has to leave his warm bed night after night, just like a sailor going on for his four-hour watch on board ship, and the romantic side of the picture is soon forgotten. One must have a real “vocation” to persevere year after year in such a life! And in winter time Carthusian churches can be almost arctic in their temperature, for—unlike the cells—they are never heated. So there must be a real *supernatural* motive to enable a Carthusian to endorse the following sentiments, which can be found expressed

in more than one book dealing with the life of the Order.

"For a Carthusian the time of the Night Office is the time he looks forward to with greatest eagerness; it is his time of consolation. It is then that his *day* begins, just at the time when the heedless world begins its round of sad pleasures and folly, and when so few Christians think of sanctifying their hours of sleep. Eagerly then, he makes his way to choir; he chants with a recollection which enables him, so to say, to taste each word of the Psalms. He never finds this holy night watch too long, though it may be prolonged from two and a half up to three hours, according to the rank of the festival, in the accomplishment of this prime duty."¹

At the close of the long Office, which generally includes Lauds of the Dead, the Angelus is rung, and the monks return to their little houses in silence. But before taking their second period of sleep they have to recite privately in their oratories Prime of the Office of Our Lady, and certain prayers peculiar to the Order, including a so-called "dry Mass" of the Blessed Virgin, i.e. all the liturgical parts of the Mass, excluding the Canon—a survival of a common practice of the Middle Ages.

The hermit-monk then retires to bed again for another three hours' repose, rising again at 5.45, so as to be ready a quarter of an hour later to recite in his oratory Prime of the day, and Tierce of the Little Office of Our Lady. The "horarium" for the rest of the morning varies slightly according to different localities. In most Charterhouses the monks assemble

¹ *The Carthusians*, p. 81.

in church at 6.45 to recite the Litanies of the Saints, which is followed by the sung Conventual Mass. On certain days, when prescribed by the rubrics, two Conventual Masses are sung, and there may even be a third sung Mass should there happen to be a Requiem on some important anniversary. The priests then say their own low Masses, each priest serving the other in turn.

Much has been written about the Carthusian liturgy, which differs in many respects from the Roman. It retains many features still found in the rite used in the archdiocese of Lyons. The Carthusian Mass has undergone but few changes since the eleventh century, and there are many features going back to an even more remote antiquity. The most characteristic point about the Carthusian rite is its extreme simplicity—it is simple in the actual rite itself, simple in the ceremonial which accompanies it, yet it is full of curious details that even the stranger, ignorant of such matters, cannot help noticing, especially the long prostration of the celebrant at the foot of the altar before he puts on his vestments, the substitution of the words *vitam futuri* for *vitam venturi sæculi*, as in the Credo in the Roman rite, a translation from an early Greek version of the Nicene Creed. Then to those accustomed to the many genuflections of the modern Roman rite, it seems strange to see the profound bows which form the Carthusian method of showing reverence to the Blessed Sacrament. Only after the Consecration, before elevating the Host, does the Carthusian bend his knee, and then without touching the ground.

In innumerable other minor details will the pilgrim who assists at a Carthusian Mass find much that is

strange and novel, for the Order has managed to resist practically any changes in their Office and Mass since the eleventh century. Their calendar commemorates not many more saints than does that of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. They have stood out against organs and all harmonized music. For the Carthusian, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament is a modern and rather extraordinary devotion, and only during the octave of Corpus Christi will you find it in use in Carthusian churches. No blaze of candles illuminates their altars, and save on great festivals, they content themselves with two.

On returning to his cell after Mass, the monk finds that the disposition of his time is guided by only one rule, to recite the Divine Office at the appointed hours as rung by the church bell. To this nothing must be preferred. For the rest, there is a general indication that he should as far as possible occupy himself with God in prayer until dinner-time. Then till Vespers is time for work, while between Vespers and supper he will again turn to his books and his prayers. But a wide discretion is left him. Juniors and novices have more precise rules. After Mass the beginner spends half an hour in meditation, followed by another half-hour devoted to manual work, either indoors or in his garden. The work varies according to the individual. The hour for dinner (only in certain exceptional cases is there "breakfast" in a "Charterhouse") varies from ten o'clock to midday, according to the time of year and whether a day is a festival or not. Before dinner Sext is recited by the religious in his oratory. Except on Sundays and great festivals, when all the community eat in the refectory, all meals are taken in the

solitude of the cell. The food is brought in wooden boxes from the kitchen to each "hermitage" by lay-brothers, who place the boxes in a kind of hatch just beside the door, ringing a bell at the same time to inform the monk that it is there for him to remove. Flesh meat is absolutely forbidden. The Rule is inflexible on this point, and no dispensation can be granted under any circumstances, not even on journeys or in cases of sickness. Several times the Holy See has offered to mitigate such inflexible rigour, but on each occasion has withdrawn the proffered dispensation at the Order's earnest wish.

In addition to perpetual abstinence from meat, there is an almost continuous fast of eight months, lasting from Holy Cross Day (September 15th) until Easter, during which time the Carthusian takes only one full meal daily, his evening repast consisting of dry bread, wine or beer, according to the custom of the country in which his monastery is situated.

During Advent and Lent, even on Sundays and feast-days, eggs, milk, cheese, and butter are likewise forbidden. This prohibition extends to all Fridays throughout the year. And unless they have been dispensed for reasons of health, on one day each week, usually Friday, Carthusians keep "abstinence," that is, they fast on bread and water.

During the summer months, from Easter to September 15th, a light supper consisting of eggs, salad, or vegetables is allowed. Such, then, is the Carthusian dietary.

After dinner is over, during which solitary repast the hermit observes exactly the same "ritual" as if he were with his brethren in the refectory, he is

allowed to spend the time until midday in recreation. Then he recites Nones of Our Lady, and of the day, which is followed by spiritual reading. On Sundays and "Chapter feasts," when the whole community dines together in the refectory, there is recreation in common after Nones has been sung in church.

Once a week, the monks take a walk outside the enclosure of their monastery. This is called a *spatiamentum*. It lasts for three hours or longer. No doubt some readers of this book who have lived either in the neighbourhood of St. Hugh's Charterhouse in Sussex, or elsewhere in the neighbourhood of a Carthusian monastery, will be familiar with the sight of the groups of white-robed solitaries enjoying their weekly *spatiamentum*. There are generally two bands of walkers, the "long" and the "short," the latter a sedate crawl suitable for the ancients, with plenty of stops for breath! Only for very serious reasons can any monk be dispensed from the walk. Indeed, Dom Le Masson, the famous General of the Carthusian Order in the eighteenth century, wrote thus: "It is only with the greatest reluctance that I grant leave off the *spatiamentum*, and then, only to the aged. So great, it appears to me, is the utility of this walk for good both of body and soul. More easily and willingly would I exempt a Carthusian monk from the Night Office, for some days, or from fasts of the Order, than from the *spatiamentum*." This is an interesting point, as it shows the importance the eremitical followers of St. Bruno attach to the cultivation of a "community spirit."

On days when there is no walk outside the monastic enclosure, the time until 2.30 p.m. is spent by the

fathers in study. Vespers of Our Lady is then recited privately in the oratory, followed a quarter of an hour later by Vespers of the day, sung in church. Unless the next day happens to be a feast, the Office of the Dead is then said. On their return to their cells the solitaries take their evening meal at 4.30 (as we have stated already, this frugal repast, from September 15th to Easter, consists of no more than dry bread and wine or beer). Various "odd jobs" fill up the time until 5.30, when there is half an hour's "recollection" and spiritual reading. Compline "of the day" and of Our Lady are recited privately by each monk at 6 o'clock and they retire to rest not later than 7, so as to have at least three hours' sleep before they are aroused for the long Night Office between 10 and 11 p.m.

The Carthusian lay-brothers spend a far less solitary existence than the priests. In fact, their special charge is the material side of the life of the monastery. They have their own rules, and although they also rise for the Office, their time for prayer is much shorter than that of the fathers. They do not live in separate "houses" like the choir-monks, but in ordinary monastic "cells," in which they have their meals in solitude, except on Sundays and feast-days when they join the rest of the community in the refectory.

Before ending this chapter some reference must be made to the Carthusian Nuns, who were founded in 1147, some fifty years after St. Bruno's death. They owe their existence to certain religious of the abbey of Pr  bayon in Provence, one of St. Radegonde's foundations. Hearing with admiration of the lives of the hermits of the Grande Chartreuse, they applied for

affiliation to the Order. St. Anthelm, General of the Carthusians at that time, acceded to their request, and commissioned John of Spain, prior of the Chartreuse of Montrieux, to compile a rule for them, which is based on the *Consuetudines* of Guigo. Many women flocked



CARTHUSIAN NUN. CARTHUSIAN NUN IN STOLE

to Prébayon, other foundations were made, and the Carthusian nuns, who always remained under the jurisdiction of the General of the Carthusians, became quite numerous in the Middle Ages.

Their spirit, like that of Carthusian monks, is essentially one of solitude and prayer. They follow the same rule and observe practically the same "horarium."

But there are certain fundamental differences in the external features of their life, mainly owing to the fact that the nuns' cells are not separate cottages or small houses, but merely rooms opening on to a corridor in their monastery. Moreover, they do not take their meals in solitude but always eat in the refectory, except on the weekly "abstinence day," when they remain shut up in their cells. They spend half an hour in recreation together daily.

An interesting point about the Carthusian nuns is that they have retained the privilege of receiving the ancient rite of the "Consecration of Virgins"—a relic probably of their ancient rule, which was that of St. Cesarius of Arles. Originally this "consecration" was nothing more than the solemn blessing of deaconesses in the Early Church, and it is still reserved to the bishop of the diocese. On the day of her "consecration" the nun wears a crown and is vested with a stole, and on the right arm a maniple is placed. She is also given a ring. At the Conventual Mass one of these "consecrated virgins" has the privilege—unique elsewhere to-day—of chanting the epistle. If no priest is present at Matins, one of the nuns chants the Gospel, and for this rite she wears a stole.

The habit of the Carthusian nuns is not unlike that of the monks, as will be seen from the accompanying sketch. There are four houses of Carthusian nuns still in existence: Beauregard (Voiron, Isère, France); Nonnenque, St. Affrique (Aveyron, France); Motta Grossa (Riva di Pinerolo, Turin, Italy), and Avigliana, also near Turin.

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CHAPTER VI

CARMELITE SOLITARIES

THE word Carmel has various significations. It is mystically interpreted as "the Circumcision of the Lamb," which meaning typifies the spirit of sacrifice characteristic of its children. The general meaning of the Hebrew word is "a garden, a beautiful hill, a choice orchard, a highly cultivated ground." In particular, and as a proper name, Mount Carmel means, not only "a garden on a mount" but "the garden mount." Every traveller in Palestine will agree in saying that there is no mountain in or around Palestine that retains its beauty as Carmel does. Its groves are few, but they are luxuriant, and in the springtime the air is fragrant with the scent of flowers and aromatic herbs.

So much for the natural beauty, which is but a dim shadow of the spiritual beauty and fertility of this most blessed mountain, the cradle of the *Order of Carmel*, which from nine hundred years before the Christian era, according to the old legends, until the present day has been the home of contemplation.

Geographically speaking, Mount Carmel is a chain of mountains about fifteen miles long, running from north-west to south-east across northern Palestine. It touches the sea-coast midway between the ancient towns of Tyre to the north, and Cæsarea to the south,



MOUNT CARMEL. CHAPEL OF ST. SIMON STOCK

and is separated from Acre (the ancient Ptolemais) by a large bay. The south-eastern slope of Carmel overlooks the rich plain of Esdraelon and the winding River Cison.

Carmel is often spoken of in the Holy Scriptures. The northern promontory, particularly, is regarded as most sacred. Here is to be found the "Grotto of the Prophet," a spot still held in the greatest veneration, not only among the Christians of all rites, but even among the Arabs, the Turks, and the Druses. The grotto is about fifteen feet long, and twelve feet high, and it served the Prophet Elijah as an asylum and oratory. Over the grotto itself there stands to-day the magnificent Basilica of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, which is considered to be one of the most ancient of Our Lady's shrines. There is also a cave in the mountain, called the "Grotto of the Sons of the Prophets," now in Moslem possession. The "Fountain of the Prophet" is southward, a little more than two miles.

The whole mountain is sacred to the memory of Elijah (Elias) and his followers, Elijah being so illustrious among the prophets that he was selected to represent them at Our Lord's Transfiguration. Even to-day Moslems look upon him as the one chosen finally to overthrow "Dujjal," or the anti-Christ, after a terrible combat, and they call Carmel "Jebel mar Elias," or the "Mountain of St. Elias."

Some medieval writers have maintained that Elijah was the real founder of the monastic life, but as the so called "Sons of the Prophets" appear in Holy Scripture two hundred years before he is mentioned, i.e. during the time of the prophet Samuel, they cannot

have been founded by Elijah. What organization they may have had we have no means of knowing.

According to an ancient tradition, this succession of solitaries has always existed on and about the holy mountain. Innumerable caverns are shown, which they inhabited, called by the natives—"Schifel Ruban"—or "Caves of the Religious," some of which have windows, and even beds, cut in the solid rock, and near them are little fountains of clear limpid water.

The immediate successor of Elijah was Elisha (or Eliseus, the son of a rich labourer of Abelmeula). He appears to have been in regular communication with the "Sons of the Prophets," but the whole matter is very vague. After Elisha these "Sons of the Prophets" disappear entirely from Scripture.

After a break of seven or eight hundred years we come in the time of the Maccabees (with the captivities between) to the Rechabites. About the middle of the first century of our era we read of the first Christian solitaries. They are mentioned by Pliny. We also hear of the Essenes and Therapeutæ. Even if the Rechabites, the Essenes, and Therapeutæ were all somehow connected with the "Sons of the Prophets" (which many modern critics deny), from the twelfth to the tenth century B.C., there would now be a gap of another thousand years between the Rechabites and the hermits on Mount Carmel in the middle of the twelfth century A.D., making two gaps of a thousand years each.

There is a tradition that intercourse existed between the solitaries on Carmel and the parents of Our Blessed Lady, and that, as a child, she visited Carmel with them. It is not improbable that the Holy Family

may have rested here on their way back to Nazareth from Egypt, as Carmel would lie on the direct route along the coast. There is a tradition that as early as the third century A.D., Christian hermits lived on the mountain. St. Dionysius, Pope (d. 259 or 268), was among their number, and grottoes numbering more than a thousand, which were inhabited by these solitaries, can still be visited. There is a legend that in 612 Chosroes, Emperor of Persia, invaded Palestine and laid waste all the holy places. According to some chroniclers, the hermits of Mount Carmel suffered great hardships during these persecutions of Christianity, which practically ceased to exist in Palestine. Some of the hermits are said to have fled to Europe to seek protection from the Holy See. Special favours were granted by Pope Leo IV in 847 to all who would assist by alms the solitaries on Mount Carmel. But there would seem to be little or no proof in confirmation of all this.

A doubtful tradition states that after Palestine had been conquered by the Crusaders, Aymeric of Malifay, supposed to have been papal legate at Jerusalem, instructed a certain Berthold of Limoges, who had joined the solitaries on Mount Carmel, to unite them into a congregation. About 1170 Berthold drew up a rule of life for his ten companions, having built a church and dedicated it to the prophet Elias. A contemporary writer, Benjamin of Tudela, a Spanish Jew, also mentions that "not far from Hepha and the Jewish cemetery is the cave of the prophet Elias; two sons of Edom (i.e. two Christians) have built a chapel there."

After the fall of Jerusalem in 1187 the number of

solitaries on Mount Carmel greatly increased. In 1209 their rule was confirmed by St. Albert, the papal legate, who lived at St. Jean d'Acree. From this, dates the real foundation of the *Carmelite Order* as we know it to-day. By 1230 the community of Carmel was more numerous than it had ever been before: "dwelling alone in their cells day and night, in order to meditate on the law of the Master and to watch in prayer" (Primitive Rule of Mount Carmel). But owing to the state of affairs in Palestine, the country had become more and more dangerous for Christians to live in. So some six of the hermits left the mountain and made the first European foundation near Valenciennes in France, and another at Aygalades, near Marseilles. Soon afterwards they came to England, where they settled at Chesterton, near Cambridge. A vast amount of doubtful legends have grown up regarding a hermit named



PRIMITIVE HERMIT OF
MOUNT CARMEL

Simon, nicknamed by his neighbours, "Simon of the Stock," who about this time lived in a hollow tree-trunk at Aylesford, on the banks of the Medway in Kent. He had spent over sixty years in this manner. One day he is said to have had a vision that an Order of solitaries would come from the East and that he was to join them. He waited a long time before he could do so, and then a foundation was made at his

native village of Aylesford, where a general chapter of the Order was held in 1247, and, according to later traditions, St. Simon Stock found himself elected general. In this capacity he travelled extensively all over Europe, and busied himself with transforming the primitive eremitical life into a purely cenobitical one, a change approved by Pope Innocent IV in 1247. He is supposed to have spent six years as a hermit on Mount Carmel. He is said to have died in 1265. But modern critics are inclined to disbelieve most of the facts of the story since no mention is made of Simon Stock's name in any documents previous to 1362, i.e. a hundred years after his death.

The solitary life continued on the mountain until the capture of St. John of Acre by the followers of the Prophet Muhammad in 1291, when those hermits who had been unable to escape were ruthlessly slain. "When the last martyr fell under the sword of the Saracens and Mount Carmel stood solitary by the sea, mourning for her departed children for over four centuries." ¹

A further mitigation of their Rule authorized by Pope Eugenius IV in 1431 left practically nothing of primitive Carmelite austerity, since it was necessary to bring the Rule into harmony with the changed conditions under which the friars were living. It was at that time that the first convents of Carmelite nuns were founded. By the beginning of the sixteenth century the Order had spread all over Europe, becoming specially rooted in Spain. Attempts had been made in various quarters to return to a closer adherence to the Primitive Rule than that permitted by successive

¹ *Mount Carmel*, p. 58 (London, 1923).

papal mitigations, and even that easier rule was not everywhere well observed. But it was due to St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross that the lasting reform known as the Discalced Carmelites came into being. Their first house was opened in 1568, and the constitutions, drawn up by St. Teresa herself in virtue of a brief granted her by Pope Pius IV in 1565, were finally approved in 1581.

In them special emphasis was laid on the contemplative character of the Order. They state that provision should be made for the building of hermitages to which the brethren can retire "according to the custom of our holy fathers." Four hermitages were therefore established in Andalusia, in one of which, La Peñuela, St. John of the Cross found a refuge after his imprisonment at Toledo, and where he wrote many of his works. But the building of the hermitage-convents resulted in a certain division in the Order, for it meant that its members were sharply divided into active and contemplative hermits, since the communities in the hermitages abandoned all active missionary work, which belongs to the Carmelite vocation as much as contemplation. It is due to the efforts of Father Thomas of Jesus that those dual elements among the Discalced Carmelites were reconciled. Father Thomas effected this by the establishment of what are known as "desert" convents—i.e. monasteries where any members of the Order could retire from time to time to live the solitary life.

The first "desert" to be built was at Bolarque, on the banks of the Tagus, near Pastrana. Opened in 1592, the monastery was of the most humble kind. The buildings were small and entirely lacking in any

convenience. The cells, separated from each other by wooden fences, were little better than rude huts, and a heavy fall of rain converted the place into a swamp. Very truly did the Venerable Thomas of Jesus exclaim, on his first official visit to Bolarque, "*Terribilis est locus iste!*" ("How terrible is this place!") The food of the hermits consisted of little else but dry bread and water, varied occasionally with roots, salad, vinegar, oil, and salt. After a while the superiors of the Order had to modify the excessive penances of the solitaries, and the primitive buildings of wood gave place to others of a more permanent character, but still bearing the impress of Carmelite poverty in their plan and construction. The chapel stood in the centre of the cloister. Scattered about on the surrounding hill-sides were thirteen little cells, built at the expense of individual benefactors. In 1601 special rules were drawn up for the desert convent of Bolarque.

The love of solitude never died out in the Order, although it had ceased to be an eremitical one after coming to Europe. During the Middle Ages we come across many individual Carmelites who had obtained permission of their superiors to live as hermits. But the establishment of desert convents gave an opportunity for any friar to retire into complete solitude from time to time. It was laid down in the Constitutions that there should be a desert convent in every province. The normal period of residence was to be a year. Many friars used to return to the deserts every four or five years after a period of active mission work in the world. Residence in a desert was not a penance imposed by superiors on insubordinate subjects, but a special privilege granted only to those who

had the necessary zeal and fervour to support such an austere life. The word "desert" does not imply that such convents were built in arid and sandy wastes. On the contrary, most of them stood in situations of almost romantic beauty. St. John of the Cross in his *Spiritual Canticle* recommends that they should be erected on sites where God has left special traces of His infinite beauty—"Vestidos los dexo de Su hermosura."

Yet the desert convents must not be erected too far remote from civilization; it would not be convenient, especially as the communities were not permanent, but only temporary sojourners in the wilderness.

According to the primitive statutes of the Spanish Discalced Carmelites, the ground on which they were built had to be spacious enough to allow of the erection of a certain number of little hermitages, separated from each other, as well as from the main buildings of the convent. But the whole property must not be too large, otherwise the cost of looking after it would be too great. There must be a wall surrounding the enclosure with a porter's lodge at the entrance, together with a small chapel for the use of guests and the neighbouring inhabitants. Visiting priests were never allowed to say Mass in the convent chapel, unless they were prelates or abbots. Other priests were obliged to use the "extern" chapel.

The monastery was built at some distance from the entrance, generally rectangular in form. In some of the desert convents the chapel occupied the centre of the courtyard, or cloister-garth. In others it was placed on one side of the cloisters, with the refectory, kitchen, and library adjoining. The cells themselves were

usually built around the cloisters. They were similar in plan to those of Carthusian monasteries, consisting of two or three rooms with a small garden. But everything was on a much smaller scale and marked



CARMELITE HERMIT

by a note of poverty and simplicity lacking in the majority of Charterhouses. For the Carmelite hermits, unlike the sons of St. Bruno, were no more than temporary lodgers in the desert, and not permanent residents.

The community of a typical desert convent consisted of twenty to twenty-four members. It was governed by a prior who had already passed some years in the eremitical life. He had to be capable of giving spiritual help and direction to the other solitaries. Hence

he was never absent from his monastery. The permanent community of a desert convent consisted of at least four friars, including a sub-prior and procurator. The remainder were made up of priests and students, among the former being fathers who were admitted for a short period of three months or so to prepare themselves for giving missions or retreats. Lay brothers looked after the domestic wants of the monastery. A friar, having obtained permission of

his superiors to retire to a desert convent, on his arrival, had to take part in a short service of admission. After this he was introduced to the brethren and taken to his cell.

The "horarium" followed in a Spanish desert convent in the seventeenth century was as follows. Just before midnight the hermits were roused for Matins, a service lasting never less than an hour and a half, for long pauses were made between the verses of the Psalms. A half-hour's meditation followed, after which the friars returned to their cells. They slept till 5 a.m., being awakened for an hour's mental prayer, succeeded by Prime, and Low Masses. No breakfast was taken, the first meal of the day being eaten after Tierce, Sext and Conventual Mass had been said—towards 11 o'clock. On certain days the solitaries fasted on bread and water and on Fridays no hot dishes were served. Dinner was followed immediately by a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, after which the hermits could spend a brief recreation in the solitude of their gardens, or they could take a short siesta if they wished. Vespers were said about 3 p.m., the rest of the afternoon being devoted to study or manual work. Two hours later they met again in church for mental prayer, at the conclusion of which they had supper. They were then permitted to take a solitary recreation in the wooded grounds of the enclosure. Compline ended with spiritual exercises of the day. The words "*In silentio et in spe erit fortitudo vestra*" seem to sum up the spirit of the Carmelite "desert." The life was an austere one, but there were no excessive mortifications, and it could be led by any one of normally strong constitution.

Strict injunctions were laid down in the statutes that poverty should be observed in everything. No marble was allowed in the church, but wood, painted



CARMELITE DESERT CONVENT, MAJORCA

in imitation of marble, was permitted! The altar candlesticks had to be of wood; the vestments of wool or cotton, never silk, just as with the Cistercians. At High Mass the deacon and sub-deacon wore albs,

without dalmatic or tunicle. Processions were prohibited, and the Office was generally recited in a monotone. The Conventual Mass was only sung on Sundays and great feasts.

The hermits were forbidden to speak to visitors. Silence was rigorously observed, all communications being made by means of signs, except in the case of the prior, who could speak to any one.

In addition to those cells connected with the main buildings of the convent, there were also a number of separate hermitages in the woods of the enclosure. In the earlier days of St. Teresa's reform, these were very numerous, but later on they became fewer. They consisted of small cottages with two or three rooms and a chapel, surrounded by a wall. From time to time, the occupants of the desert convents were allowed to retire to these hermitages for a given period, each friar taking with him a basket containing enough food to last him a week—bread, salt, wine, dried fruits, and a supply of candles and a few books. They returned to the monastery on Sunday and stayed till the evening in order to assist at the community Chapter, High Mass, and Vespers. While living in an isolated hermitage the hermit was bound to follow exactly the same horarium and rule of life, as if still living in the monastery. He had to ring his bell when he heard that of the convent, and recite the Office at the same time and with the same ceremonies as he would do in church. His daily Mass would be served by another hermit, with whom he was forbidden any conversation. From time to time the prior would visit the solitaries in their respective cells. In case of any urgency, a hermit could ring his bell and a lay-brother

would come to his assistance. Nobody was allowed to retire to one of the cells until he had already spent at least two months in a desert convent. All the solitaries were bound to return to the monastery for Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. At the close of their stay in a desert convent a ceremony took place, similar to the ceremony of admission, before the friars returned to their active work in the world.

A friend who spent some years in a modern Carmelite "desert" in Spain, tells me that the life there does not differ much from that just described. The eremitical cell has three small rooms—a sleeping-room or "cell," a kitchen and an oratory. The "deserts" are surrounded by a wall, often enclosing pastures and extensive woods.

There are two fasts on bread and water during the year—on Good Friday and Shrove Tuesday. Every Friday, unless it is a feast, there is a very meagre repast of beans cooked in water without seasoning, and this is repeated for supper. No sugar, tea, or coffee is ever used in a *Santo Desierto*; onion or leek soup being allowed by way of "breakfast."

As for Carmel itself, after being abandoned and neglected for close on four centuries, the holy mountain became once more the home of solitaries in 1631. In that year Father Prosper of the Holy Ghost, a Spanish friar, obtained permission from his superiors to retire to Palestine with two other Carmelites in order to take up the eremitical life in the sacred locality where it had been lived in the time of the prophet Elias. A Jesuit father who visited Mount Carmel in 1652 gives us an interesting account of the life of this solitary. "He persevered for long years in this mountain in

continual prayers, fasts, and mortifications, chanting day and night the Divine Office in the Chapel of the Virgin at the regular hours, even though he was often alone; and fulfilling all the exercises of the monastery without fail, even to ringing the bell for greater punctuality. Often he passed Advents and Lents in the most frightful deserts of the interior of Carmel, taking with him only a little dry bread for his nourishment, and whatever was necessary for saying Mass, on an altar he built himself with stones, placed one upon another, in a grotto unknown to men; there he sang the Divine Office day and night, offered Mass without a server by permission of the Pope, and passed all his time in contemplation except that which he was obliged to grant for the repose of nature." The writer goes on to tell how Father Prosper had such a reputation for sanctity that the "Christians, Arabs, Moors, and Turks called him the great, the venerable, the Holy Religious of Carmel," and that "an Arab princess used to come with bare feet and prostrate to beg his blessing."

The later history of Mount Carmel is a broken one. The present monastery, built in 1761, has been attacked, abandoned and reoccupied on more than one occasion, and is to-day filled with a flourishing community of religious, filled with the double spirit of Elias: prayer and contemplation. The modern pilgrim can still visit the untenanted and half-ruined hermitage of Father Prosper, dedicated to that English friar, Simon Stock, of Aylesford, Kent. No more ideal retreat could be desired than this cave on the slopes of the mountain, looking out over the wide sea towards the setting sun, where, ever since the days of the Old

Testament prophets, men of all conditions, young and old, rich and poor, of noble or of common birth, have pursued the quest of solitude.

The limits of space imposed on this work forbid any detailed description of the more famous of the Carmelite "deserts."¹ For those who wish to study the fascinating story of this branch of the eremitical life I refer my readers to Father Benedict Zimmerman's book, *Les Saints Déserts des Carmes Dechaussés* (Paris, 1927). At the close of the eighteenth century most of these convents had been closed, and although several attempts have been made to reopen them from time to time, there are no more than one or two in Europe to-day, where the pursuit of peace and solitude is being carried out by the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.²

¹ LIST OF CARMELITE DESERT CONVENTS —(a) SPAIN: *Bolarque*, near Pastrana New Castile *Nuestra Señora de Las Nieves*, Andalusia twenty-seven miles from Malaga, 1593; *Las Batuccas*, near Salamanca, 1597, reopened 1914; *St. John the Baptist*, diocese of Santa Fé, Mexico, 1606; *El Cardon*, near Tortosa, Catalonia, 1606; *Bussaco*, Portugal, 1628; *Las Palmas*, 1694; *Bilbao*, Navarre, 1700; *Cambrona*, Murcia, 1713; *El Cuervo*, Jerez, 1688; *Alcalá*, 1599 (the only desert convent of Carmelite nuns, cf. *La Reforma*, X, c. 12); *Rigada*, Santander, 1897. (b) ITALY: *Varazzo*, Genoa, 1616; *Varese*, Lombardy, 1633; *Monte Virginio*, Rome, 1668; *Sorrento*, Naples, 1682. (c) OTHER COUNTRIES: *Marlagne*, Namur (Belgium), 1619; *Czerna* (Poland), 1629; *Virons Blaye*, Gironde (France), 1641; *Mannersdorf* (Austria), 1644; *La Garde Chatel*, Louviers, Eure (France), 1660; *Nethen*, Louvain (Belgium), 1689; *Tarasteix*, Hautes-Pyrénées (France), 1859.

All these Desert convents have now been suppressed with the exception of *Las Batuecas*.

² Desert convents were also founded by the Calced, or unreformed Carmelites. Among them may be mentioned *La Graville*, near Bernos, in France (1641), also *Neti*, near Syracuse (1741). They were all closed after a time and none exist to-day.

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CHAPTER VII

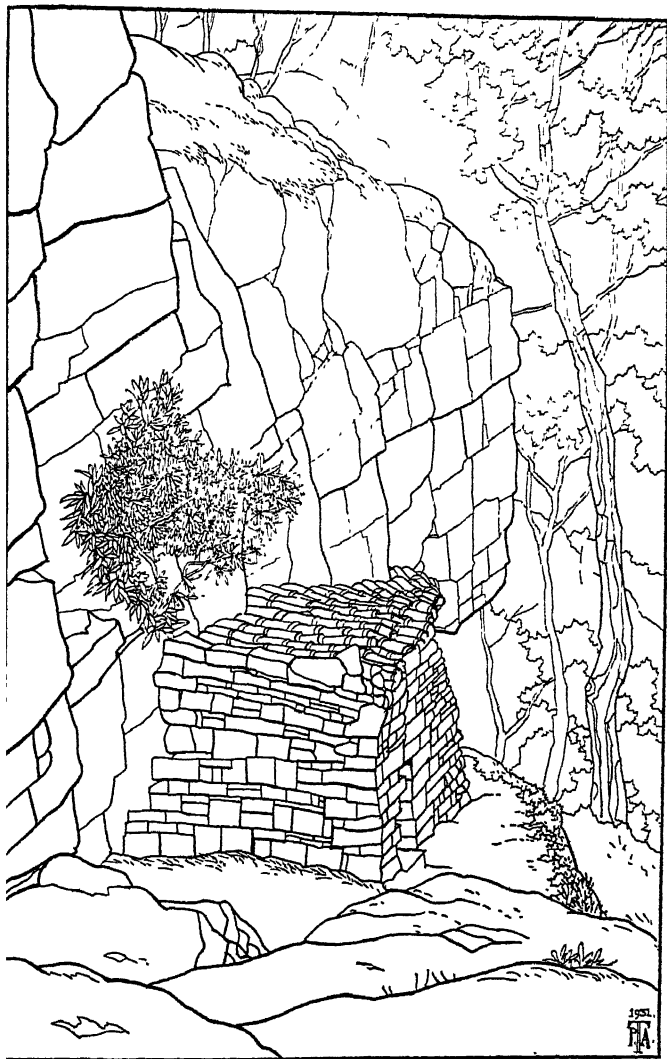
FRANCISCAN AND DOMINICAN SOLITARIES

IN the *Little Flowers of St. Francis* (c. xvi) we read that the saint "a short while after his conversion, having already gathered together many companions and received them into the Order, fell into deep thought and much doubting as to what he ought to do; whether to give himself wholly unto prayer, or some time also unto preaching; and on this matter he much desired to learn the will of God. And for that the holy humility that was in him suffered him not to trust over-much in himself nor in his own prayers, he thought to search out the will of God through the prayers of others." And the writer goes on to tell us how he sought the advice of Saint Clare, Brother Masseo, and Brother Sylvester. The last "forthwith fell on his knees in prayer and as he prayed received answer from God." He replied as follows. "Thus saith the Lord. Say unto Brother Francis that God has not called him to this estate for himself alone, but to the end that he may gain fruit of souls, and that many through him may be saved." And Saint Clare gave the same reply. "Then St. Francis called Brother Masseo into the wood," continues the author of the *Fioretti*, "and there kneeling down before him, drew back his hood and stretching out his arms in the shape of a cross, asked him: 'What has my Lord Jesu Christ commanded that I

should do?' Replied Brother Masseo: 'As unto Brother Sylvester, so likewise unto Sister Clare and her sisters, has Christ made answer and revealed that it is His will that thou go throughout the world to preach, since He hath chosen thee not for thyself alone, but also for the salvation of others.' " And then St. Francis, when he had heard this answer and known thereby the will of Jesu Christ, rose up with fervour exceeding great and said: "Let us be going, in the name of God." St. Bonaventura (*Leg. Maj.* XII, 2) also refers to a somewhat similar incident as that related in the *Fioretti*, and tells how St. Francis discoursed on the relative merits and advantages of the active and contemplative lives. Celano likewise mentions how the saint used frequently to seek out solitary places where he might give himself wholeheartedly to God. And how marvellously has Ubertino da Casale described the love of St. Francis for solitude in his *Arbor Vitæ* (lib. 5, c. 3). But the most precious witness of St. Francis' attraction for the eremitical state is that piece of legislation found in his writings, known as *De religiosa habitatione in eremo* ("Of living religiously in a hermitage") which runs thus:

"Let those who wish to live religiously in hermitages, be three brothers or four at most. Let two of them be mothers and have two sons, or at least one. Let the two former lead the life of Martha and the other two the life of Mary Magdalene.

"Let those who lead the life of Mary have one cloister and each his own place, so that they may not live or sleep together. And let them always say Compline of the day toward sunset, and let them be careful



HERMITAGE OF BLESSED BERNARD OF QUINTEVALLE,
THE CARCERI, ASSISI

to keep silence and say their Hours and to rise for Matins, and let them seek first 'the kingdom of God and His justice.' And let them say Prime and Tierce at the proper time, and after the hour of Tierce, they



EARLY FRANCISCAN
HERMIT

may break silence and may speak and, when it is pleasing to them, they may go to their mothers and may ask an alms from them for the love of the Lord God, like poor little ones. And after that, let them say Sext and Nones and Vespers at the appointed time.

"And they must not allow any person to enter into the cloister where they live, or let them eat there. Let those brothers who are mothers endeavour to keep apart from every person and, by the obedience of their custos, let them guard their sons from every person, so that no one may speak with them. And let those sons not speak with any person except with their mothers and with their custos, when it shall please

him to visit them with the blessing of God. But the sons must sometimes in turn assume the office of mothers, for a time, according as it may seem to them to dispose. Let them strive to observe all the above diligently and earnestly."

To understand the scope of this peculiar document, Father Paschal Robinson, O.F.M. (now Archbishop of Tyana and Nuncio at Dublin), reminds us that in the beginning the followers of St. Francis had no

settled abode. "The wide world was their cloister." (*Writings of St. Francis*, p. 87.) Possessing nothing, they wandered about like children, careless of the day; teaching or preaching, passing the night in haylofts or under church porches, in lazarettos, or deserted huts or grottoes. The need of having some kind of permanent retreat where they might retire at times to pray or rest resulted in the institution of hermitages. These little solitudes, to which Francis loved to withdraw, may be found wherever the saint went. The Celle near Cortona, the Carceri on Mount Subasio (near Assisi), Greccio in the valley of Rieti, and the more solitary hermitages, like Lo Speco, form, as one has said, a series of documents about St. Francis's life quite as important as the written ones. And not a little of his spirit still lingers in such of these hermitages as yet remain."

Perhaps the most celebrated of all of them is that known as the Carceri, built in a secluded hollow on the slopes of Monte Subasio. St. Francis and his followers often retired to this remote spot, where some natural caves in the woods served as shelter. In the time of St. Bernardino of Siena a small hermitage was built here. The Carceri has always remained the ideal type of convent St. Francis wished his sons to live in: lowly and poor, just affording the bare necessities of life, and no more. Below the convent in the deep gorge, where the stream is said to have dried up in answer to the prayers of St. Francis who was disturbed by its noise, can still be seen the caves wherein dwelt some of the early Franciscans—Anthony of Stroncone, Bernard of Quintavalle, Silvestro, and Andrea.

Then at La Verna in Tuscany, that strange-looking

mass of limestone, bare and barren on its lower slopes, first rising very gradually, but shooting up skywards in great rocky precipices, its crest covered with pines and beech-trees—there are many proofs of St. Francis's eager quest of solitude. Did not Count Orlando, when he offered the mountain to the saint, describe it as "very solitary and meet for those that desire to do penance in a place from the world or to lead an eremitical life." St. Francis visited La Verna six times altogether. The modern pilgrim is still shown the little cell where the saint spent the "Lent of St. Michael the Archangel," and where Brother Leo used to visit him "once a day with a little bread and water, and once at night at the hour of Matins," coming in silence, and saying naught but *Domine labia mea aperies*. If Francis answered "Come," then Leo would enter the cell and the two would recite Matins together. But if no reply came, then Leo would return straightway, knowing that his master was so rapt in God that he neither heard nor perceived aught with his bodily senses."

But even more sacred is the Chapel of the Stigmata, built on the site of the hut of wattle and daub, where St. Francis received in his hands and feet the marks of his crucified Saviour on the night of September 14th, 1224. At La Verna one can also visit the hermitage of Brother Leo, a roughly-hewn cave in the side of a rocky cliff, another grotto known as the Bed of St. Francis, situated in the very bowels of the earth, where the saint delighted to retire for prayer, also the so-called "first cell of St. Francis." At some distance from the monastery, hidden in the dark forest that clothes the summit of the mountain, stands yet another

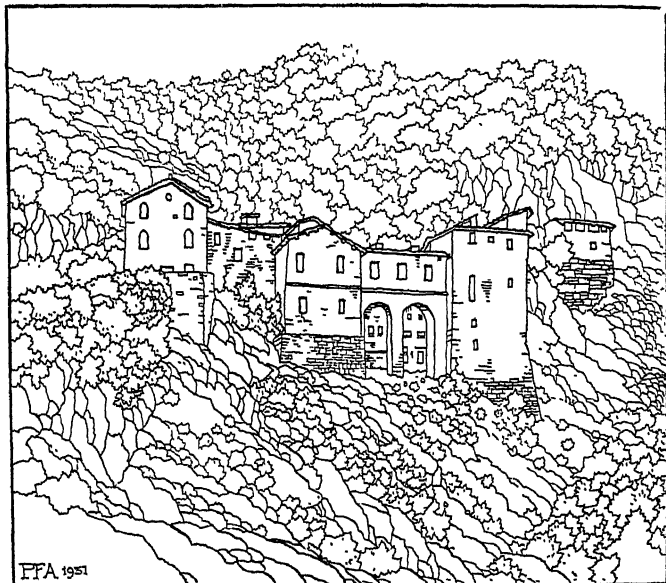
hermitage, that of Blessed Giovanni della Verna, where this well-known follower of the "Poverello" lived in solitude for over thirty years.

To the south-east of La Verna, four miles from Borgo St. Sepolcro, lies the little Franciscan hermitage of Monte Casale, situated among densely-wooded mountains, but not often visited by pilgrims, on account of its remote situation. Here one can see the grotto of St. Francis with the bed hewn out of the rock, and the wooden pillow. About two miles from Cortona is to be found the hermitage of Le Celle, which, like Monte Casale, now belongs to the Capuchin branch of the Franciscan Order. It is built on the site of some caves where St. Francis and his disciples often retired from time to time, and where one of them, Guy of Cortona, lived in solitude for many years. The actual cells of the present hermitage, dating from the fourteenth century, are built of lath and plaster, the doors being so small that one has to bend down to enter them.

The valley of Rieti, that wide, cultivated amphitheatre closely engirdled by the massed mountains so remote and apart from the rest of the world, contains no less than four primitive Franciscan hermitages, still remaining in their unspoilt simplicity—Greccio, Fonte Colombo, La Foresta, and Poggio Bustone. Greccio, the "Franciscan Bethlehem," was originally nothing more than a series of caves hollowed out in the steep slopes of a mountain. Here it was that the saint instituted the devotion of the *Presepio*, or Crib, on the Christmas night of 1223. Greccio is also connected with Blessed John of Parma, one of the thirteenth-century "spirituals," who lived here as a hermit for

thirty-two years after having been deposed from the generalship of the Order for his supposed sympathy with the teachings of Joachim of Flora, the twelfth-century Cistercian abbot, at one time hermit in Calabria, who died in 1202.

Fonte Colombo was a very favourite retreat of St.



FRANCISCAN HERMITAGE AT GRECCIO

Francis. Like Greccio, it was originally no more than a rocky cave overlooking a wild valley far below, with a mountain stream rushing down a stony bed. "*Solve calceamenta de pedibus tuis enim quo stas terra sancta est*" ("Take off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place in which thou standest is holy ground") is the fitting inscription which greets the pilgrim on entering

the *santuario* of Fonte Colombo. Here one sees the tiny chapel of St. Mary Magdalene, the most perfect example of the primitive Franciscan church in Italy, very small and very poor. Beyond this is the grotto where St. Francis spent long periods of solitude and where he composed the existing Rule of the Order, also the grotto of Brother Leo.

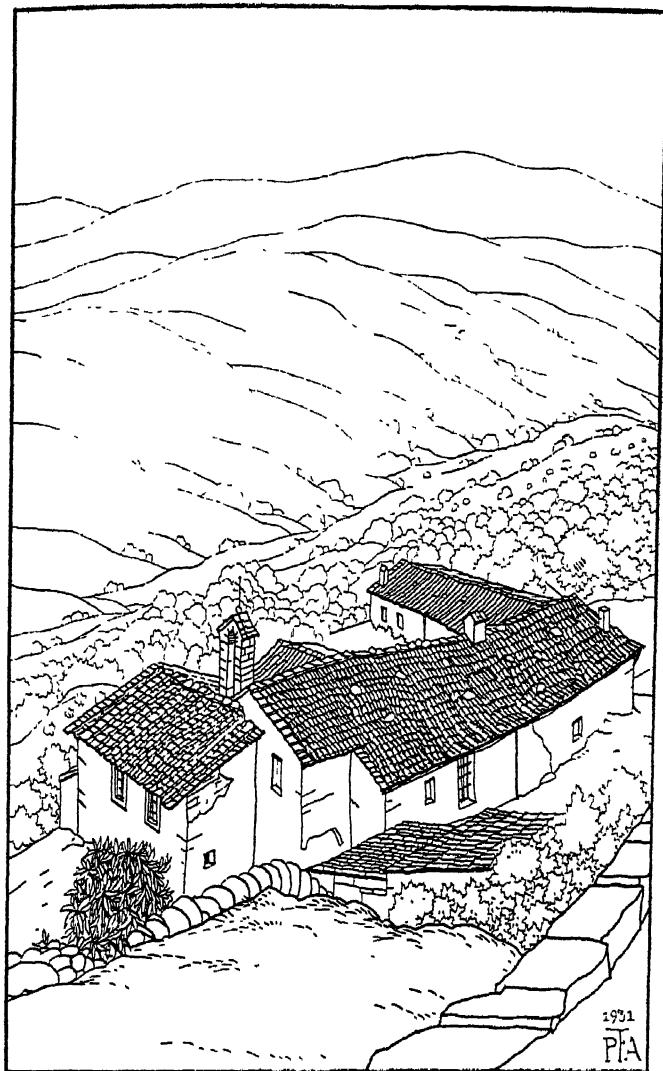
The hermitage of La Foresta was yet another retreat of the saint, some two miles from the city of Rieti, while Poggio Bustone is situated in a remote seclusion, difficult of access and seldom visited in these days, except by enthusiastic lovers of St. Francis. Here a steep path leads up the savage and desolate-looking mountains to the Eremo, which consists of a small chapel hewn out of a rock. In this lonely cell St. Francis spent more than one period of solitude, and here, in an adjoining cave, he received from an angel the message of peace that his sins were forgiven, and that by God's grace he would not fail at the last.

These are some of the more famous hermitages sanctified by the presence of St. Francis himself. But there are many more, scattered over Umbria and Tuscany—Lo Speco, that lovely spot among the ilex- and chestnut-covered hills near Narni; Monte Luco, near Spoleto; the island on Lake Trasimeno; and the island known as S. Francesco del Deserto, in the Venetian lagoons, to mention but a few, nearly all of them still inhabited by "Fрати."

After the death of St. Francis in 1226 his Order became divided into two great parties—the Spirituals and the Community (or Conventuals). The Spirituals aimed at putting into practice the letter of the Rule of St. Francis as well as its spirit in the matter of

poverty and simplicity. They refused to compromise on any details of discipline, whereas the Community sought to obtain papal permission to interpret in a less rigid sense St. Francis's rules against holding any form of property. An external manifestation of this breach within the Order was the building of large monasteries in towns, and such magnificent churches as the Basilica of San Francesco at Assisi. The Spirituals, especially a few of the still-living disciples of the saint, felt that in order to be true to the teaching of their master there was nothing else to be done save retire to some of the hermitages already mentioned, where they could live in solitude and poverty. They were not willing to recognize any interpretation of the Franciscan Rule save that given in the Testament of the saint. Some of them went so far as to confuse the spirit of open insubordination to lawful superiors with the spirit of loyalty to their master. Their antagonism became so violent that before long they found themselves the object of persecution. Thus the rift in the Order became wider and wider.

But they found both encouragement and consolation in the teachings of Abbot Joachim of Flora, already mentioned. From his apocalyptic writings the Spiritual friars in their lonely hermitages in the Apennines imagined, rightly or wrongly, that they had more than sufficient proof that they were an elect body of Christians charged to fight against the "Beast," and called apart from the rest of the world to prepare themselves by penance and prayer for the age of the Holy Ghost which Abbot Joachim prophesied would appear in 1260, a golden epoch which would replace the age of the Son (or New Testament), as the latter



FRANCISCAN HERMITAGE OF LO SPECO, NARNI

had replaced that of the Father (or Old Testament). "The glow of his teaching," writes Miss Vida D. Scudder in her *Franciscan Adventure*, "was suffusing Italy just before the time of Francis; it was a meteoric shining, but brilliantly alluring. True, Joachim's arresting scheme was based on fantastic analogies and a tortuous process of reasoning; but no medieval mind would balk at these. Joachim gave to Franciscan thought of the thirteenth century, the rationale, every movement rooted deep in instinct needs as it proceeds."

Not only did his writings encourage the Spirituals in their attachment to the letter of the Rule of Poverty, but also in their quest of solitude. For had he not lived for forty days in retreat on Thabor, the mountain of Transfiguration, and there received the divine mandate for prophecy? And they remembered also that after having ruled as abbot of Corazzo in Calabria, he had once again betaken himself to the solitary life in order to write those books of prophetic vision which appeared after his death in 1202.

Among the Franciscans who were convinced followers of Joachim of Flora was the Minister-General, John of Parma, who, under pressure of the Pope, had to resign his office on the charge of heresy in 1257. He escaped to Greccio, always a stronghold of the Spirituals. "The little hermitage hangs high on the mountain-side, among the storms and rainbows that haunt those majestic Apennines. John's small cell, which pilgrims may still visit, commands all glories of sky and sombre hills, of swift-descending slopes, and valleys filled with shadow. It is a place where solemn thoughts are quite at home."¹ Here he

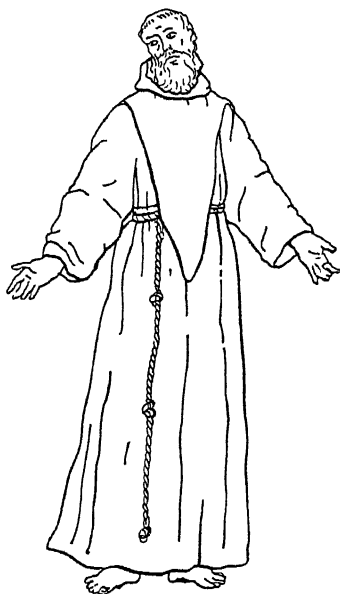
¹ V. D. Scudder, *op. cit.*

remained more than thirty years. But when his eightieth year had come, he left his mountain solitude with the purpose of trying to heal the schism between Rome and Constantinople. He got no farther than Camerino in the Marches of Ancona, where he fell ill and died, and where the pilgrim can still venerate the body of this son of St. Francis, who loved so passionately the solitary life.

Many of the Spiritual friars "fled to the fastnesses of the Apennines," writes Father Cuthbert, O.S.F.C., in *The Capuchins*, vol. i, p. 26, "and sought freedom to live as St. Francis lived, in humble friaries or hermitages far removed from the highways of the world. Here they kept alive a vivid memory of the primitive life of the Order and jealously conserved all records left by those who knew St. Francis and could witness to the life he led and intended the brethren to lead. To them we owe, in fact, many of the most authentic records of St. Francis and the first Franciscan days."

Among these brethren in the Marches was a young friar known as Brother Angelo of Clareno, who had been imprisoned in 1278 for maintaining, amongst other charges, that should the superiors of the Order countenance laxity of observance in the Rule, any of the brothers would be justified in withdrawing and obeying that Rule in solitude. He remained in prison for thirteen years. On his liberation he was sent to do mission work in Armenia—no doubt to get him out of the way—but he returned to Italy in 1293, when he sought permission from the newly-elected Pope Celestine V, who himself had been a hermit, and who was therefore friendly to the plan, for him and

his followers to separate from the main body of the Franciscan Order to live as hermits, according to the strict rule of St. Francis. The Pope agreed, but almost immediately afterwards he abdicated, and



"FRATICELLO"

his successor, Boniface VIII, revoked the permission. Consequently, Angelo of Clareno and his followers migrated to Greece, where they lived for some years, then returning to Italy, where endless attempts were made to suppress them. In 1317 Pope John XXII at Avignon condemned Angelo for heresy. After defending himself against his enemies he escaped to Italy, where he managed to avoid further molestation by hiding himself in the Apennines and the Marches of Ancona. In

1318 he assumed charge of all the "Spiritual" hermits who were scattered up and down Italy, now known as the "Fratricelli," appointing provincials, ministers, custodians, and receiving novices, maintaining that the permission granted him to form the Order of the *Pauperes heremitæ domini Celestini*—or poor hermits of Pope Celestine—still held good, despite the decrees of later Popes, whom he maintained were living in mortal sin, owing to the worldly nature

of their lives, thus rendering their sacerdotal powers invalid. In other words, he founded an independent Franciscan Order which he called *Fratres de paupera vita*—Brothers of the Poor Life. They were hunted and persecuted wherever they found even a temporary refuge. They hid themselves in the fastnesses of the Apennines and often found safety and protection in the castles of the nobles or, strange to say, in such rich and powerful Benedictine abbeys as Subiaco, where at one time Angelo appears to have lived, disguised as a Benedictine. In 1334, Pope John XXII issued an edict to the effect that "the demented heretic" Angelo of Clareno was to be imprisoned. But papal briefs were useless. The "Brothers of the Poor Life" were too much loved by the mass of the people, and Angelo was not touched. He died in 1337. Later on his followers were split up into numerous branches, united only by violent opposition to the papacy and a deep-rooted love of poverty and the eremitical life.

It is not easy to trace the history of the other branches of "Spirituals" and "Fratricelli" that existed in Italy during the Middle Ages. All of them started as bodies of Franciscan hermits, holding very much the same views as the followers of Angelo of Clareno, but most of them gradually evolved into little more than heretical sects. Among them was the group known as the Spirituals of Sicily, formed by some of the Tuscan friars who had fled there in 1312, where, joined by "Zealots" or "Zelanti" from France and other parts of Italy, they were protected by King Frederick. Banished from the island in 1318 by the bull *Gloriosam Ecclesiam*, they eventually settled near Naples.

There were also the followers of Brother Michael of Cesena, and many other groups of wandering "Fratricelli" who all lived a more or less eremitical life when they were not being sheltered in the houses of wealthy



FRANCISCAN "SPIRITUAL"

nobles or in Benedictine monasteries. In 1388 the abbot of Farfa got into trouble with the ecclesiastical authorities for protecting some "Fratricelli," and there are other cases of sympathy shown by Benedictine superiors for these heterodox sons of St. Francis.

By 1400 energetic measures had been taken to suppress them. The Bishop of Ancona issued strict orders that all "Fratricelli" were to be sought out, seized and put to the rack. All villages suspected of being in sympathy with them were to be destroyed, the population dispersed, and children separated from their parents. St. John Capristan and St. James of The Marches were especially zealous in this direction. We read of more than thirty establishments of "Fratricelli" being burnt, most of them in the valley of Jesi, and in the neighbourhood of Masaccio, Maiolati, and Rosoro-Mergo. The Franciscan "Spiritual" movement started as a quest of solitude and poverty. It had now become little more than a queer heretical sect, split up into numerous divisions, holding semi-communist opinions,

and united only by a fierce hatred of popes and prelates.

Yet the primitive spirit of the early followers of the saint, untainted by the heretical opinions of the extreme "Fratricelli," still lingered on in unsuspected places, one of these being the hermitage of Brogliano, in the mountains near Foligno, where the "Observant" movement came into existence in the fourteenth century owing to the exertions of Blessed Giovanni delle Valle and Blessed Paolo Trinci. The former had been initiated into the principles of the Franciscan life by Angelo of Clareno, and Paolo Trinci was his disciple. After his death in 1351, the latter sought approval for his rapidly increasing disciples. In 1368 he succeeded in founding in this same hermitage a new group of Franciscan friars, who, while living in submission to the Minister-General of the Order, intended to follow the almost-forgotten precepts of the "Poverello" in regard to strict poverty and solitude. They were known as the "Observants."

In the sixteenth century these same "Observants," whose observance which had sufficed for the hermitage of Brugliano did not contemplate large friaries in cities, had sadly deteriorated since the days of Paolo Trinci, split up into new groups, in all of which we find the quest of solitude the chief object of their separate existence. In Italy there were the "Riformati"; in Spain the "Alcantarines"; in France the "Recollets"; all these sub-divisions lingering on in the main Franciscan body until they were finally abolished by Pope Leo XIII by the constitution *Felicitate quadam* in 1897.

On a winter day in the year 1525 a solitary friar,

dressed in the habit of St. Francis, entered the gates of Rome from the north. He attracted no attention. He himself little realized at the time that he was about to set in motion a vast movement that was to kindle



"RIFORMATI"
FRANCISCAN

a fire of enthusiasm which was to restore the primitive observance of the Franciscan Order. He came to Rome merely to be alone. His name was Matteo da Baschi, a simple peasant by birth, never a great hand at book-learning, but coming from that race of visionary realists who live by an ideal and whose souls starve when the freedom to pursue the ideal is taken from them. In his friary in the Marches of Ancona, where there still lingered a vivid tradition of the early Franciscan days, Matteo had absorbed the tales of the lives of the first followers of St. Francis and of the "Spiritual" brethren who followed him. He began to

compare his own observance of the Rule with theirs, and he was not satisfied. One day when he was at prayer, pleading for light and guidance, he seemed to hear a voice which bade him "observe the Rule by the letter." Matteo was a visionary. But at the same time he was practical, and so he took the most direct and the simplest course open to him. He would submit himself to the Vicar of Christ and ask for his

supreme permission to live the Franciscan Rule even as St. Francis himself had lived it. One night when his brethren were asleep, Matteo stole away from his convent, and set out for Rome. After all, he was not the first friar who had broken away from the common life and obedience to superiors, and whose technical apostasy had been blessed by Popes. It was a bold step to take, but it was at the same time the romantic beginning of a movement which led to the foundation of the Capuchin Reform. Father Matteo sought and obtained an audience with Pope Clement VII, who gave him permission to live the life of a hermit and to follow to the letter the Rule of St. Francis, on condition that he presented himself every year to the chapter or to the provincial on whom he depended. But in his child-like simplicity, Matteo did not ask for any written proofs of the papal authorization, and the provincial, in the exercise of his rights, had him imprisoned as an apostate. News of the situation reached the ears of the Duchess of Camerino, Donna Emilia, who had not forgotten Father Matteo's services during the plague in Camerino some time previously. Thanks to her intervention he was released, retiring to a hermitage near Matelica.

Here he found two solitaries, Fra Francesco da Cartoceto and Fra Pacifico. The latter had been praying for many years for a renewal within the Order of the primitive Franciscan spirit. He felt sure he would see such a renewal before his death. The night before Matteo arrived, the old hermit had dreamed that a young man clothed in the primitive habit was coming to Matelica to announce the glad news that the day of renewal was near, and he was now awaiting the

coming of the stranger. The old man was dying, but throughout that night the two friars communed with each other, and before he passed away he asked his companion to make a rough habit, similar in shape to that worn by Fra Matteo, and bade him clothe him with it.

We have no space in which to relate in detail the somewhat complicated events of the next two years; of Fra Matteo's wanderings in Umbria and the Marches of Ancona; of how he was joined by Brothers Ludovico and Raffaele of Fossombrone, of how they sought shelter for a time with the Camaldolese hermits at Masaccio (referred to in Chapter IV), to whom they requested to be affiliated, until at last, thanks to the faithful support of the Duchess of Camerino, they obtained from Pope Clement VII on July 3rd, 1528, the bull *Religiosus Zelus*, which gave a canonical status to the new fraternity, whose numbers had increased rapidly. In this important document the Pope writes: "To you who desire, for the salvation of souls and the glory of God, to lead the hermit's life, and so far as human frailty permits to observe the rule of the Blessed Francis, yielding to your supplication, We grant you by Our Apostolic authority the right to wear the habit and the square capuce or hood, and to grow your beards, and to retire to hermitages, and there live. . . ."

To these early Capuchins the primitive form of the Franciscan habit, grey in colour¹ (as they rightly or wrongly considered it to be), was the outward symbol of their aim to revive the primitive spirit of the Franciscan Rule. "It was the flag under which they fought

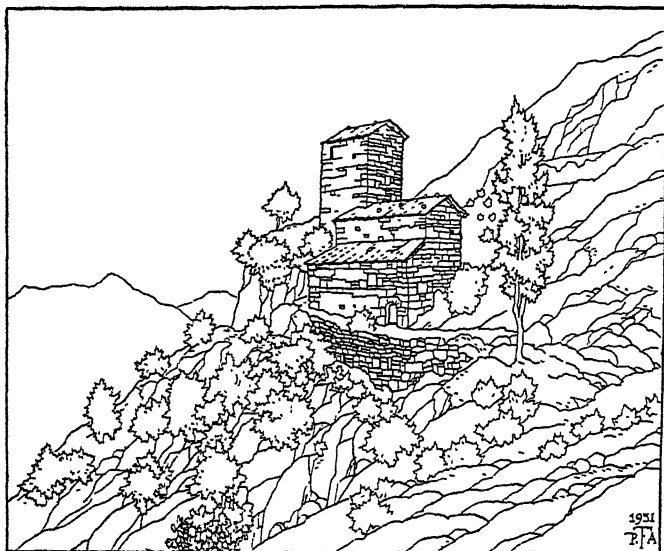
¹ The first Capuchins who went to Germany were derisively called "Wolf-monks," in reference to the colour of their habit.

for a cherished ideal. It meant more to them than a piece of cloth of a particular shape: to them it was the outward manifestation of an inward life." (Father Cuthbert, O.S.F.C., *A Capuchin Chronicle*, p. x.)

So, too, the matter of the beard, in which the Capuchins seem to have been influenced by their friendship with the Camaldolesi hermits at Massacio. To them it was a symbol of the eremitical life they intended to lead.

The first Capuchin foundation was made just outside Camerino in a deserted hermitage at Colmenzone, given by the Duchess Caterina. The community soon numbered eleven, and this necessitated a new foundation, since one of the chief principles of the reform was that only a few friars should live together in one place. So a second hermitage was opened at Monte Melone, between Macerata and Tolentino, followed soon after by others at Albacina, near Fabriano, and at Fossombrone. In April 1529 the first chapter, consisting of twelve friars of the Reform, was held in the little hermitage of St. Maria dell' Acquarella, whose ruins can still be seen in their solitary isolation on the edge of the mountains above Albacina, not far from the railway station of that name on the line from Fabriano to Ancona. It is a remote and inaccessible spot, whose silence is only broken by the murmur of the torrent far below in the valley or the songs of birds. "One must go back in mind to the first days of the Franciscan fraternity," writes Father Cuthbert, O.S.F.C., in *The Capuchins* (vol. i, p. 52), "to find such another chapter as that which now assembled at the hill-side hermitage of Albacina. In no order of decency could the twelve be lodged in the

narrow hermitage; to receive them all it was necessary to build some wattle huts. Of food there was a scarcity, for the friars would not fare better than their hungry neighbours, even when the affection of the people would force gifts upon them. They had



ST. MARIA D'ACQUARELLA, ALBACINA (CAPUCHIN HERMITAGE)

neither beds nor tables; they slept on straw upon the ground . . .”

The Constitutions were drawn up in the Italian vernacular, not in scholarly Latin—a symbol of the entire simplicity of their outlook.

“Thus were the friars of the new reform to live,” continues Father Cuthbert. “They were to recite the Divine Office on a monotone without chant or modulation of voice, and rise at midnight for Matins,

even on the last three days of Holy Week. No public office was to be added to the Divine Office, that so the brothers might have more time for mental prayer. Only one Mass was ordinarily to be said in each friary at which all the priests should be present; but on solemn feasts all the priests might celebrate. They were not to accept stipends for Masses, nor to sing High Masses to attract a concourse of people. On no account were they to follow funerals or celebrate dirges; nor to take part in processions except the Liturgical procession of Corpus Christi and Rogation days. Silence was to be strictly observed in the friaries. At table, ordinarily only one dish was to be served. The friars were not to quest for meat, cheese, or eggs; but if these foods were voluntarily offered them, they might accept them. No store of food might be laid in beyond what was necessary for three or four days or a week at most; but they must quest from day to day. Those who were unable to go barefooted might wear sandals. . . . Their houses were to be built outside cities and towns, yet not too far distant from them; the proprietorship always being vested in the municipality or the donor, who might turn the friars out at will; in which case the brethren must without delay go and seek another place. Wherever



CAPUCHIN HERMIT

possible, the houses must be constructed of wattles and mud; but where this was not possible stone might be used. The cells were to be so poor and small that they might be taken for sepulchres rather than cells. The churches, too, must be small and poor, though withal decent and clean; only two or three vestments were allowed, and these must not be of velvet, silk, or gold cloth. Even the chalices must be of pewter, not of silver or gold."

It would be interesting to discover how far the Chapter was actually influenced by the customs of the Camaldolese hermits at Masaccio—the "Company of St. Romuald," founded by Blessed Paolo Giustiniani (see p. 94) when drawing up these Constitutions.¹ In the bull *Religiosus Zelus*, the Pope Clement VII allowed to the new congregation all the privileges of the Camaldolese hermits, one of which was that religious of any Order might be received by them.

The life of these early Capuchins, "Friars Minor of the eremitical life"—*de vita heremitica*—as the papal bull describes them, was an austere one. Their garments were of the coarsest material; they went barefooted even in winter. The *Capuchin Chronicle*² (p. 46) states that "they took their meals together, often eating out of the same pottage made of bread and vegetables, which sometimes lasted for three days, as most of the brethren fasted on bread and water. If meat were given to them in alms, say a piece of coarse beef, it was served up at their meal, but they never ate chicken or other poultry. They never roasted

¹ An article on this subject from the pen of Father Burchard of Wolfenschiessen appeared in *Collectanea Franciscana* for January 1931.

² Edited by Father Cuthbert, O.S.F.C. (London, 1931).

meat, and a frying-pan was unknown in the house. A bottle of oil would last eight friars for a fortnight, for they scarcely used it except as seasoning for fresh salad or vegetables. . . . The wine placed on their table was so well watered that one scarce perceived it to be wine at all, and only very rarely did they sup in the evening, and then sparingly, for it was remembered that, for one hundred years after the death of St. Francis, supper was an unheard-of thing amongst the brethren of Santa Maria degli Angeli. This custom was held to, but on days other than fast days a basket of bread was handed round, and those who wished could help themselves to a morsel and take a little drink, but supper other than this there was none, and many adhered to this rule."

When hermitages were to be built it was the brethren themselves who did the work. These buildings were always low, of one story when possible, the partitions between the cells being made of wood and loam. A board served for their bed; the sick friars were allowed a mat. The doors were made so low that a man had to stoop to enter them. The windows were small and narrow and without glass.

Even to-day one still comes across Capuchin friaries, built in the earlier years of the sixteenth century, that retain much of the primitive simplicity of the "Friars Minor of the Eremitical Life." Typical Capuchin hermitages are to be found in the Marches of Ancona, at Fossombrone, Amaldola, Renacavata, and Camerino. Others still exist in the Canton of Ticino, Tuscany, Umbria, Apulia, and in other remote parts of Italy.

We have no space to write of the later history of the Capuchin reform, indeed it would be outside the

scope of this book, for it was not long before the friars abandoned their quest of solitude, settled in or near large towns, and while still retaining much of their primitive austerity, gave themselves up to an active life of mission work and preaching.

Again, much might be written concerning the members of the Third Order of St. Francis who adopted a life of solitude. There were the recluses, such as St. Viridiana (died 1244), who was locked up in a cell at Castel Fiorentino in Tuscany, where she lived with two snakes for thirty-four years, St. Colette of Corbie, who reformed the Poor Clares (1381-1447); and Blessed Jane of Segna (died 1307). There were hermits like St. Conrad of Piacenza (1290-1351); Blessed Gerard of Villamagna (1150-1245); Blessed Torello of Poppi (died 1282); Blessed William Cufitella of Sicily (died 1411); Blessed Francesco of Pesaro; Blessed Vitalis of Bastia (died 1491); to mention but a few tertiaries who followed an eremitical life. Perhaps the best known of all these Franciscan tertiary hermits was Blessed Ramon Lull (1232-1315), philosopher, mystical writer, and apostle to the Moslems. On Monte Randa in the island of Majorca can still be seen the spot where stood the hermitage wherein he spent several months in preparation for his arduous mission.

And so throughout the seven hundred years of its history the Franciscan Order, despite its external activities both at home and abroad, has again and again had recourse to solitude whenever it was a question of reviving the primitive spirit of the founder in his attempt to imitate literally the life of Christ.

DOMINICAN SOLITARIES

The solitary life in a strict sense is definitely precluded by the aim of the Dominican Order: "the salvation of souls by the preaching of truth," but the contemplation on which the Dominican apostolate is based—*contemplare et contemplata aliis tradere*—demands a certain measure of solitude.

Solitude in Dominican life. The principle taught by Our Lord's forty days in the desert and His withdrawals into solitude in the midst of His ministry are applied in the minimum of eight years spent by every Dominican friar in prayer and study (much of which is done in the solitude of the cell) before he begins apostolic work, and in the monastic life with its prayer, silence, and solitary study which are the normal interludes to Dominican preaching.

Dominican teaching on solitude. St. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica*, Q. 188, art. 8) quotes St. Augustine: "Those are holier who keep themselves aloof from the approach of all, and give their whole mind to a life of prayer." Solitude is not the essence of perfection but a means thereto, and a means adapted to contemplation but not suitable to religious orders given to the works of the active life, corporal or spiritual, "except perhaps for a time, after the example of Christ, who . . . *went out into a mountain to pray; and He passed the whole night in the prayer of God*" (Luke vi, 12). Solitude befits the perfect, but is dangerous if undertaken without preliminary training in social life.

St. Dominic and Solitude. Of his life as Canon

Regular at Osma, Blessed Jordan of Saxony says in his *De Initiis Ordinis Prædicatorum* that "he was day and night in the church, praying without ceasing, and hardly ever seen outside his cloister lest he should lose leisure for contemplation. . . . It was his custom to spend the night in prayer, speaking to God in solitude." Gerard de Frachet says (*Vitæ Fratrum*, written 1256) that the saint's nights were spent in prayer "alone with God in the church." Paul of Venice, witness in the process for the saint's canonization, remarked that when journeying he would sometimes say to his fellow-travellers, "Go on ahead and let us think of Our Lord," and so fall to prayer. The *Codex Rossianus* relates that after the Divine Office and meals, "overflowing with devotion inspired by the holy words chanted in the choir or refectory, he would make haste to seek solitude in a cell or elsewhere to read and pray, recollected and absorbed in God." While founding a house of his Order at Segovia he would withdraw to pray and do penance in a cave which, says Lacordaire in his Life of the saint, "has for centuries borne traces of the blood he shed there."

Dominican Solitaries. The Dominican Order allows wide scope to individuality and has not refused to recognize special vocations to solitude even among the friars (e.g. Blessed Dalmatius Moner (1291-1341), who lived in a hermitage at the Saint Baume and Blessed Gundisalirus (1187-1259), in Portugal).

Convent annals of the *Nuns of the Order* (enclosed and contemplative) record instances of a special attraction to solitude, as in the history of San Domenico e Sisto edited by Père Berthier, O.P., but such annals are of course nearly all unpublished. The

Constitutions of the nuns prescribe that those not otherwise occupied by the work of their respective offices shall spend some time, except on feast days, in a common workroom, but provision is also made for solitude. That of the cell is sacred, the Constitutions forbidding the nuns to enter one another's cells without permission and necessity. The Novitiate Observances of nuns (as well as friars) of the English province exhort the novices to prefer the solitude of their cells to the common-room.

Many Dominican tertiaries have been solitaries. "The *Ancren Riwe* may perhaps have been written for three women tertiaries of St. Dominic, and a later codex of it which contains many additions certainly refers to tertiary convents in Oxford, Shrewsbury, and elsewhere." (Father Bede Jarrett, O.P., *The English Dominicans*.) St. Catherine of Siena lived for three years in solitude and silence before beginning her active apostolate. St. Rose of Lima (1586-1617) built herself a tiny cell in her father's garden, where she spent most of her time in prayer, work, and penance. Blessed Sybillina of Pavia (1287-1367)—a blind recluse—lived in an anchor-hold adjoining the friars' church at Pavia. She had great influence with her fellow-citizens and was a merry soul in spite of her blindness and terrifying austerities. Blessed Hosanna (or Osanna) of Catharo (died 1565) was a Dominican tertiary who lived as an anchoress and who induced many other women to follow her example.

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CHAPTER VIII

OTHER CONGREGATIONS OF SOLITARIES

AUGUSTINIAN HERMITS

CERTAIN authors have maintained that in the time of St. Augustine there were hermits in northern Africa who followed a rule given them by this saint, and these are the supposed founders of the Order of Hermit Friars of St. Augustine. These legends, however, are historically improbable, for the latter Order only dates from the thirteenth century, and arose from an amalgamation of various groups of hermits in Tuscany under Pope Innocent IV in 1250, by the bull *Mare Magnum*.

Six years later Pope Alexander IV, in the bull *Licet Ecclesiæ Catholicæ*, ordered certain other bodies of hermits to join his congregation, and he gave them the Rule of St. Augustine. He ordered them to wear a black habit. This, in fact, is the foundation charter of the modern Order of Augustinian Hermits, which, as a matter of fact, has nothing eremitical about it except the name.

Of these congregations of hermits, scattered about Italy during the thirteenth century, the most ancient was that of the *Giovanni Bonites*, sometimes known as the "Bonites." Their founder was born at Mantua in 1168, who, after spending his youth in reckless dissipation, retired to a remote spot in Romagna,

where he lived in solitude in a little house with an adjoining oratory, not far from Cesena. Here he gave himself up to a life of prayer and mortification, and after some years, disciples began to gather round him. He obtained the permission of Pope Innocent IV to follow the Rule of St. Augustine, and it is probable that he may have known St. Francis of Assisi. The last years of his life were spent in a hermitage near Mantua, where he died in 1249.

Another congregation of hermits, almost contemporary with the Bonites, were the *Brittiani*, who lived in the province of the Marches of Ancona, and who had much in common with the Spiritual Franciscans. Their first hermitage was at Brittini, near Fano. Their life was very austere. They never ate meat, fasted from Holy Cross to Easter, and only ate cheese and eggs three times a week. On other days they lived on bread and water. Their habit was of grey, like that of the Franciscans, but to distinguish them from the latter they wore a belt instead of a cord.

There were many other groups of hermits to be found in Italy during the Middle Ages, all of which eventually abandoned the solitary life for the cenobitic. Among them were the congregations of *Centorbi* and *Coloriti*, both of which followed the Rule of St. Augustine.

The *Congregation of Centorbi* had its origin in Sicily where its founder, Padre Andrea del Guasto, once retired to a remote spot in the diocese of Catania, in order to live a life of penance. His sanctity attracted followers. Eventually they formed themselves into an eremitical community on a mountain called Centorbi. In 1586, their rule, based on that of St. Augustine,

was approved by Pope Sixtus V. In 1617 Paul V confirmed their constitutions. It is difficult to find out much regarding their way of life and subsequent history, but it seems that their rule was very severe. They depended entirely on alms for their support, observed strict fasts all the year round, spent two hours daily in mental prayer, and were discalced.

Calabria was the birthplace of the hermit *Congregation of Coloriti*, which came into being some years earlier than that of Centorbi. Its founder, one Bernardo di Rogliano, had retired to a mountain village called Morano, where he lived in a cell adjoining a chapel dedicated to Our Lady. The inevitable thing happened; his life there attracted others to imitate his example, and before long they had formed themselves into a community. In 1562 the Duchessa di Bisignano presented them with a

mountain close by where they built a hermitage. In 1600 they were amalgamated with the hermits of St. Augustine. Previous to this date they wore a tan-coloured habit, with mozetta and capuce. Helyot states that this congregation spread to Dalmatia.

The Discalced Augustinians were founded in Spain by the Venerable Thomas of Jesus in the fifteenth century, the congregation eventually spreading to



AUGUSTINIAN HERMIT,
CONGREGATION OF
COLORITI

Italy. They were not altogether an eremitical Order, but according to the constitutions there had to be a "House of Recollection" in each province, situated in a lonely place far from a town. These houses, not



SPANISH AUGUSTINIAN HERMIT

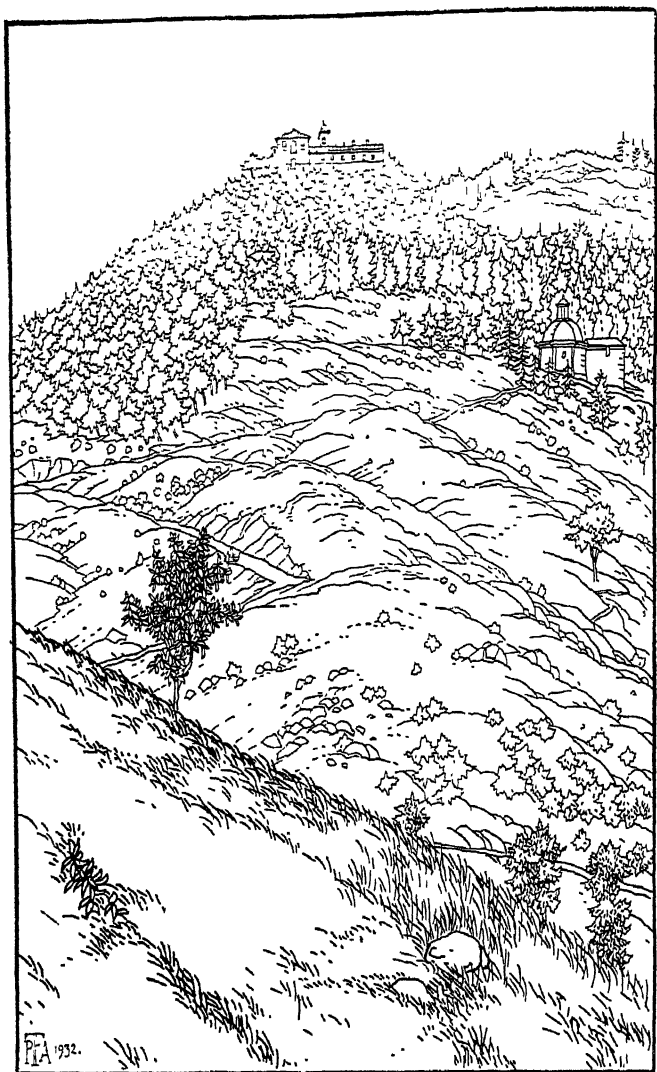
unlike the Carmelite desert convents, consisted of several hermitages, each with three rooms and an oratory. On certain more important feast-days the hermits were allowed to converse with each other; otherwise they remained in their houses, keeping strict silence. On Sundays they met together for Mass. From Palm Sunday to Low Sunday they were obliged to return to an ordinary monastery and follow the normal rule. Twice a week while living in their hermitages the prior would visit them. Except on great

festivals women were forbidden to enter the oratories or chapels attached to the "Houses of Recollection." Strict abstinence from flesh meat, fish, and eggs was obligatory, the normal food of the hermits being fruit and vegetables. No member of this reformed congregation of Augustinians could be sent to live in one of the "Houses of Recollection," except at his own request. Even in their ordinary monasteries they kept a strict rule of silence. Their habit resembles that

of the Capuchins, except that it is black, for the Discalced Augustinians still exist as a missionary Order in many parts of the world.

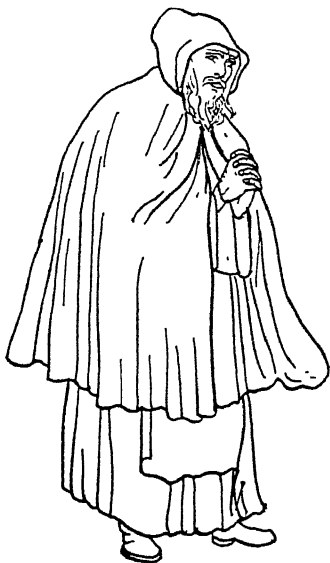
THE SERVITES

Not far from Pratolino, a few miles from Florence and very conspicuous when one is looking northwards over the city, from the slopes of St. Miniato, there rises up a peak, considerably higher than the surrounding Apennines, three thousand feet above the sea-level, known as Monte Senario. This was the birthplace of the *Order of the Servants of Mary*, commonly known as the *Servites*, founded in 1234 by seven Florentine gentlemen who fled from the worldliness of that city in order to devote themselves to lives of prayer and penance. On the slopes of the mountain stood the ruins of an old castle. Here they constructed a small oratory dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows, and for shelter they were content with the rude protection afforded by some natural caves in the rock which are still visited by the pilgrim. They lived in extreme poverty, subsisting chiefly on roots and herbs gathered from the surrounding country-side. At midnight, when the city of Florence was asleep or given over to pleasure, they met together in their little chapel to chant the praises of God. From time to time one of their number would leave his solitude to go down to the city to beg for food. In order to obviate the necessity of returning the same night, they obtained possession of a hospice on the site of the present Church of the Annunziata. These austerities, however, began to tell on their health,



MONTE SENARIO

and they were obliged to modify their penances. They asked the Archbishop of Florence, who had already shown the greatest interest in their spiritual adventure, to give them his official sanction, which he did. Thus came into existence the Order of Servites, following the Rule of St. Augustine. The title given them was *The Brothers of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus*, and in honour of the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady the archbishop clothed them in black. Their fame spread abroad. Many disciples joined them. Before long, foundations were made at Siena and elsewhere in Italy, and gradually the eremitical character of the Order disappeared, and they became a cenobitic community.



SERVITE HERMIT

Two hundred years later, one Padre Antonio di Siena asked leave of his superiors to live as a hermit, other religious following his example. The General of the Order gave his permission, and soon after there came into being a new congregation of Servites, called the *Congregation of the Observance*. The rest of the Order called themselves "Conventuals." During the greater part of the sixteenth century a certain number of Servites continued to live the solitary life, but in 1560 the General abolished the congregation. In 1593

another Servite, Padre Bernardino di Ricioni, feeling a call to the eremitic life, started another reform in the Order. Many observances were adopted from those of the Camaldolesi, and the life lived by these new hermits on Monte Senario was almost as severe as that of the seven founders in the thirteenth century. Their habit resembled that of the Camaldolesi, except that it was black. After a while the fervour of these hermits declined. Their number decreased, and finally they were abolished. To-day the Servites are purely an active Order.

HERMITS OF ST. PAUL

St. Paul, the so-called "First Hermit," was the patron of many eremitical congregations formed in the Middle Ages, among which are those of Hungary, Portugal, and France.

The Hermits of the Order of St. Paul in Hungary were founded by Blessed Eusebius of Strigonia about 1250, who sought the solitudes of Pisilia. His followers united themselves with another group of anchorites known as the Hermits of Petach. The Order increased in number and soon had hermitages in various parts of Hungary. King Charles II obtained the approval of Pope John XXII for the Congregation, and he gave them the Rule of St. Augustine. In later years they spread to Germany and Poland, where they took charge of the famous shrine of Our Lady of Czentochowa. Finally, they abandoned the solitary life altogether and their observances became the same as those of any other cenobitical order.

In Spain and Portugal the hermits of St. Paul owe

their existence to a certain Bento Citoien who had adopted the life of an anchorite, together with several companions. They lived in adjacent cells. According to Helyot, the Congregation was affiliated eventually to that of Hungary, although remaining autonomous and having its own provincial until 1578. Other authorities maintain that the Spanish Hermits of St. Paul were founded in the twelfth century by Ferdinand Anez, formerly Grand Master of the military order of Avis.

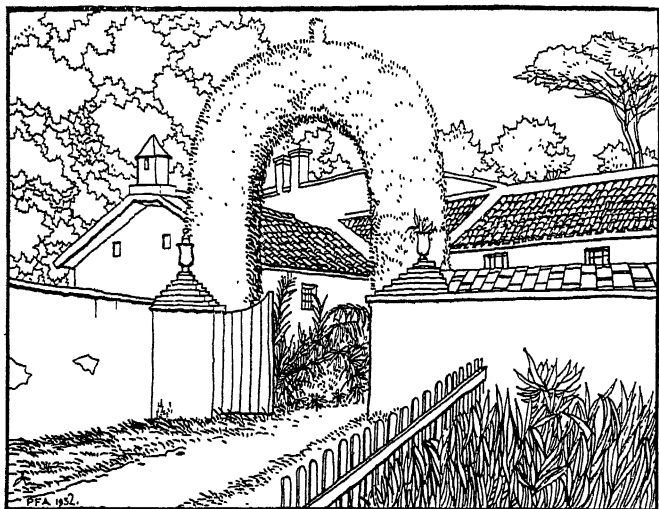
In 1415 Mendo Gomez di Simbria, captain in the army of King John of Portugal, retired to a hermitage at Mendoliva, near Setubal, about twenty miles south-east of Lisbon. Some years later another group of hermits at Serra di Ossa, finding themselves without a superior, invited Mendo Gomez to accept the position. He did so, and having affiliated his followers

to the former gave them the name, *Congregation of St. Paul*. This is the origin, then, of the Hermits of St. Paul in Portugal. Their history is similar to that of the Hungarian Congregation. They abandoned the quest of solitude, transformed their hermitages into monasteries, took up preaching and mission work, and the only sign of their ever having been hermits was to be found in their name.



HERMIT OF THE ORDER
OF ST. PAUL

The sole survivors in the Iberian peninsula of the Hermits of St. Paul are to be found near Cordova, in the "Desert of Our Lady of Bethlehem," eight miles or so from the city. Legend attributes the beginnings of this congregation to Osius (257-358), the bishop of Cordova made famous by his share in the Arian con-



HERMITAGE AT CORDOVA

troversy. No representative of it, however, is known in the neighbourhood until the year 1309. It is said that the first solitaries who settled in what is now known as "Las Eremitas" were soldiers who had deserted from the army of King Ferdinand IV of Leon and Castille, who was at war against the Moors in Andalusia. They hid themselves in the wooded hills near Cordova, feeling that a life of prayer and penance was better than one of earthly strife. After

a time they adopted the rule of the Hermits of St. Paul. Many others joined them, and thus came into being the community which still flourishes.

Early in the fourteenth century they established themselves in some caves at the foot of the hills, but a hundred years later they removed to the top of an adjacent mountain. Here they have remained until to-day, except during a short period after the anti-religious riots in 1835 and the suppression of the male communities in Spain. The other eremitical communities in Spain have all perished, but the "Desert of Our Lady of Bethlehem" still survives.¹

The manner of life of these solitaries of Cordova is described by "Deicola" in an article in *Pax* (August 1929), from which we venture to quote the following passages:

"The hermits are all laymen; no priest is allowed among their number. They thus keep up the ancient and most venerable tradition of those perpetual models of eremitical life, the Fathers of the Desert, who resolutely eschewed receiving Holy Orders, because they looked upon the ecclesiastical state as a public ministry involving active service in God's Church, a service which they rightly deemed to be utterly incompatible with the eremitical state, and also because the priesthood conferred a dignity which their humility could not accept.

¹ These hermits are sometimes confused with those of *Tardon*, founded in 1557 by P. Matteo da la Fuente, in a remote part of the Sierra Morena in the diocese of Cordova. By order of Pope Pius V they adopted the Rule of St. Basil. They are referred to by St. Teresa in the *Book of the Foundations* (C. XVII) as one of their number, P. Ambrogio Mariano di Azaro eventually joined the Carmelites. In the eighteenth century they owned four hermitages and a hospice at Seville. They observed a severe rule, with long hours of prayer and much manual labour, and wore a black habit.

“They have a chaplain, a secular priest, appointed by the bishop of Cordova, under whose jurisdiction they live. Their superior bears the title of ‘Hermano Mayor’; he has an assistant, the ‘Hermano Teniente.’ Both reside with the chaplain in a house where there is also accommodation for postulants at their arrival and for guests, and which occupies a central position in the ‘Desert.’ The other hermits live in separate cells scattered about the enclosure, each one with a plot of ground round it, fenced in, which the hermit cultivates. There are fifteen such cells, each one known by the name of a saint, twelve of them bearing the name of an apostle. The chapel and the refectory are at the central residence. The ‘Desert’ itself is surrounded by a wall and no outsider can enter it without permission from the bishop; with his leave visitors of both sexes can enter and go over the whole enclosure and see their friends and relatives, if they happen to have any among the hermits; and male visitors can spend the night there.

“The cells are strongly built with thick stone walls. Each one is divided into two very small rooms opening into a short passage. One room contains the bed, consisting of two or three boards laid on two trestles and covered with a sheepskin. The hermit lies down in his habit or at least with his underclothing on, and blankets are allowed. In this room he says his prayers and meditates, kneeling on the floor before a crucifix hanging to the wall, which is the only ornament to be seen on the bare walls. The other room ~~was~~ formerly a kitchen, for up to a recent date each hermit cooked his own food in his cell and ate there alone; but that plan was found to have disadvantages of

various sorts, so a few years ago the bishop enforced their taking their meals together in a common refectory with food for all prepared by one of them. The passage is used as a workshop, where the hermit does whatever indoor work he has to do. Novices live with the novice-master in a cell rather bigger than the others. Postulants, after spending a few days in the guest-house to be examined by the superior, go to reside with the novices. The postulant's probation lasts six months; then comes the novitiate, which lasts twelve months and is followed by profession of simple vows for one year. The vows taken are the three usual ones of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and are renewed every year on the feast of St. Anthony, Abbot. No perpetual vows are made; the hermit is free to return to the world each time his annual vows expire.

"The habit consists of a tunic and a scapular with a cowl, all of brown cloth. The underclothing is likewise of a brown woollen stuff. They wear shoes but no socks or stockings.

"Their diet consists of fish, eggs, vegetables, and fruit; no meat is allowed except to the sick. No wine is allowed either. For breakfast they have coffee and milk, or coffee alone when milk runs scarce, and at dinner and supper they drink nothing but water. Fresh fish is difficult to get there, so when they have fish they usually content themselves with salt cod. They have three meals a day, which they take all together in the refectory. Beyond the abstinence from meat and wine, their rule seems to lay no special restriction on their fare; they have no other fasts but those of the Church, and their food, though plain and

little varied, is good, substantial, and quite plentiful enough for their need.

"They meet at the central house three times a day. At 6.30 a.m. in summer, at 7 a.m. in winter, they go to the chapel for half an hour's spiritual reading, one of them reading out loud while the others listen. Then comes Mass and, after Mass, breakfast in the refectory, after which they return to their cells. At midday they meet again for a quarter of an hour's visit to the Blessed Sacrament, after which they dine. At 5.30 p.m. they return to chapel for recital of the Rosary and meditation, reading and manual labour, every occupation being commenced at fixed hours. These hours are announced by the chapel bell, rung by the Hermano Mayor, and as soon as this bell stops ringing, every hermit, to show that he is attentive and at his post, has to start ringing his own bell; for every cell has a small bell on its roof with a rope hanging in the bedroom, and the hermit has to ring, in reply to the Hermano Mayor, the same number of strokes as the chapel bell. This ringing takes place for every duty to be performed in the cell by day or by night. When the Hermano Mayor's bell convokes the hermits to chapel, they reply by coming.

"They recite every day the Little Office of Our Lady in Latin and the whole Rosary, dividing the latter into three parts of five decades each. All is said by the hermit alone in his cell except the third part of the Rosary, which they say together in their chapel before supper.

"They rise at 2 a.m. and devote two hours to the recital of Matins and Lauds and of the first part of the Rosary and to meditation. After that they lie

down to rest again till 6 a.m. in summer, or 6.30 in winter, when they rise and say Prime and Terce. At 11 a.m. they say Sext and Nones and the second part of the Rosary. Vespers and Compline are said at 2 p.m.

"On weekdays they have about five hours and a half manual labour. The time is spent in cultivating their little gardens, in which they grow vegetables and pot-herbs for the kitchen, and in making rosaries and hempen disciplines (scourges) for sale, or else articles of furniture and other sundries for the use of the community.

"Their hours of rest are from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m., and again from 4 a.m. to 6 or 6.30. They may also, if they like, take an hour's siesta after their midday meal.

"They also have time allotted to them for reading in their cells. At the central house there is a library sufficiently well stocked for the purpose; the Hermano Mayor has it in his personal charge and deals out the books.

"They keep silence all day long. The only occasion on which they are allowed to talk to each other is the walk they take all together in the country outside their enclosure once a month, on a Sunday or festival. It takes place in the afternoon and lasts about four hours; during that time they can talk freely, otherwise they never break silence between themselves.

"When they die they are buried in their own cemetery, which is close to the central residence, and the interment takes place in true Spanish fashion, that is, the coffin is slid lengthways into a niche and walled in. Their charnel-house has two rows of six such niches each.

"The produce of their land and alms are their sole means of support. They grow vegetables, as we have said, but are greatly hampered in that respect by the scarcity of water. There is no spring within their enclosure; their supply of water comes from outside and in very measured quantity. There is only one water-cock, just outside the central residence, where all have to go to fill their pitchers—an inconvenience which of course prevents them from watering their gardens at all extensively; they therefore restrict their gardening to such things as require least watering. This explains why chick-peas appear so often on their table, and are, in fact, their staple vegetable.

"They have a goodly variety of such fruit-trees as can flourish in that climate and on that soil, and which yield them an abundant supply of fruit, oranges, lemons, figs, plums of divers sorts, prickly pears and so forth. They have also many olive-trees, enough to keep them in oil all the year round; some years the olive crop is so abundant that they have a surplus of oil to sell.

"As, however, all that is not enough to cover the expenses of the year, to make up what is wanting they beg for alms. Three or four of them are sent out every year by the Hermano Mayor, not all together, but one at a time, and they go the round of the nearest towns and villages, receiving alms from people, most of whom have pledged themselves to give so much a year. They go as far as Seville and even up to Madrid, but they generally are not away more than a month at a time.

"In Cordova they own a house where their alms collectors lodge when they find it convenient to stop

a night in town on starting on their round or on coming back. There are also five or six rooms for sick hermits sent to town to receive there such medical treatment as they could not well get in the 'Desert.'

"The number of hermits is not always the same; it varies with the number of new recruits who come and of those who leave. There can never be more than seventeen at a time, all told, because there are not more than fifteen cells. Some three years ago there were twelve professed hermits, including the Hermano Mayor and his assistant, and four novices.

"Their patron saints are St. Paul, first Hermit, from whom they take their name, and St. Anthony, Abbot."

A curious congregation is that known as the *Brothers of Death* (or more correctly, the Order of St. Paul the First Hermit of France). They received their name because of the representation of a skull and cross-bones sewn on to their scapulars. Their origin is uncertain, but their first constitutions were drawn up by Père Guillaume Callier in 1620, and it would seem that then they had not been established very long. Their rule was approved by Pope Paul V and they received Letters Patent from Louis XIII in 1621.

Their observances were as curious as their habit; in fact, there was something distinctly "macabre" about their whole manner of life. Their convents were always built outside towns, the number of hermits being never less than twelve. They lived in separate cells two hundred and fifty paces away from each other. Those who wished to live as solitaries could only do so after having been professed two years in the Order, and having first obtained permission

of their superior and the whole chapter. This was only granted for a limited period. If the solitaries were priests, a lay-brother visited them daily to serve their Mass and take them food. If they were lay-



BROTHER OF DEATH

brothers a priest came to their hermitage each morning to say Mass for them. There was a monthly "chapter of faults." On Sundays and feast-days all the solitaries were bound to assist at the choir-offices with the rest of the community. The "non-solitary" members of the Order devoted themselves to mission work and visiting prisons and hospitals. Strict fasts were observed by all, hair-shirts were worn and flagellation practised three times a week.

When the "Brothers of Death" met each other, they used to say, "Pensez à la mort, mon très cher frère" (Remember death, my dearest brother). When speaking to people outside their convents they were always supposed to remind them of death, with such injunctions as "Souvenez-vous de votre dernier fin et vous ne pécherez plus" (Remember your last end and you will sin no more). Within their monasteries symbols of death greeted the eye in every direction. In every cell there was a skull, and even the refectory tables were decorated with them. On every page of the printed Constitutions were the words "Memento

Mori," and this was painted on each door, and in many other parts of the house. In fact, the "Frères de la Mort" seem to have lived in an atmosphere not very far removed from that of a mortuary or charnel-house. The congregation never spread outside France.

Yet another eremitical congregation was that of the *Madonna di Gonzaga*, whose reputed founder was Girolamo Raigni di Castelfioffre, and whose first hermitage was near Mantua. Neither Helyot nor Heimbucher give any details about them.

Much more interesting are the *Brothers of St. John the Baptist of Penitence* in Navarre, who lived near Pampluna under the obedience to the bishop of the diocese, and whose rule, of exceptional severity, was

approved by Pope Gregory XIII towards the close of the sixteenth century. At one time they owned some five hermitages in the north of Spain, each one occupied by five or six anchorites. They wore a habit of rough serge and no under-garments. At night they slept on the ground with a stone for a pillow, holding a large wooden cross in their arms. Their cells were scattered about in the middle of a wood. They met together



HERMIT OF ST. JOHN THE
BAPTIST OF PENITENCE

to recite the Divine Office in a small chapel. Their food seldom consisted of much more than bread and vegetables. Their only drink was water. Three times a week they scourged themselves and in Lent daily.



HERMIT OF THE PORTA
ANGELICA

Their habits were of brown, as were also their cloaks and scapulars.

Few details can be found concerning the *Hermits of Dalmatia* (founded by Giacomo di Pavona in 1524, and reformed by Cardinal Caraffa in 1528), those of *Bavaria* (founded near Ratisbon in 1769), as well as those in the diocese of *Lucerne*; the two latter still exist.

It is also difficult to find much information regarding the history of such Italian eremitical congregations as the *Apostle Brothers* (founded in 1484), and the *Brothers of St. Ambrose* (founded near Milan and whose rule was approved by Pope Eugenius IV in 1441). Another group of hermits, also Italian in origin, is that known as the *Congregation of the Porta Angelica*, so called because of a hospice which they opened for poor hermits coming to Rome as pilgrims. The founder was a Fra Albenza Calabrese. It stood just outside the Porta Angelica in the busy Piazza di Risorgimento, which at that time led to the open

country in the district still known as the "Prati" or fields. The brothers wore a white habit and at one time were fairly numerous.

Perhaps the most venerable and not the least interesting of the many groups of hermits which flourished in Italy during the Middle Ages is that of *Monte Luco*. They are said to have been founded as early as the fourth century by St. John of Antioch, who became bishop of Spoleto in Umbria. On the ilex-covered slopes of Monte Luco, hard by the city, he built several hermitages and the remains of these can still be seen to-day, most of them transformed into picturesque villas.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was quite a large community of hermits living on this mountain. Their manner of life and rule is one of peculiar interest. They were bound by no vows. They met daily for spiritual exercises in common. Each hermit supported himself by some useful craft or trade. They were free to leave at will. They elected a superior from their number every year. Their habit was brown, not unlike that of the Minims. Two of the hermits of Monte Luco who died in the odour of sanctity, Blessed Giles and Blessed



HERMIT OF MONTE LUCO

Gregory, are buried in the cathedral of Spoleto, where their bodies are still venerated to this day.

During the seventeenth century many Orders of hermits were formed in France, among the chief of



HERMIT OF ST. JOHN
THE BAPTIST

which was the congregation of *Frère Michel de St. Sabine*. This congregation was later reformed and reorganized by *Frère Jean Baptiste*, who had embraced the solitary life in 1632, when he retired to a hermitage at Saint Bodille in the diocese of Vienne, in Dauphiné. Later on he removed to Annecy, when the bishop asked him to take in hand the reform of the many groups of hermits which were scattered about in his diocese. After this he seems to have spent several years wandering about France, visiting other hermitages and reforming the lives and customs of these solitaires. In 1673 he was made Visitor of all the hermits in the diocese of Langres. He changed the colour

of their habit from brown to white. Finally, worn out by a life of great penance and extreme labour, he died at the hermitage of Gardelles in the diocese of Angers in 1691.

Other independent eremitical congregations in France during the seventeenth century were those of *St. Sever*, *Mont Valérien*, and *Mont Voiron*. The first-named was founded by a certain *Père Guillaume*, who, after

spending eleven months with the Camaldolese at Caen, was obliged to leave on account of his health. He retired with several companions to the forest of Saint Sever in the south-west of Normandy to an old monastery of the Camaldolese, where they followed a rule based on that of St. Romuald, given them by the bishop of Coutances. Unlike most of the French eremitical congregations of the seventeenth century, the life at Saint Sever was characterized by great moderation and liberty. The hermits could go out of the monastery, slept in a dormitory instead of separate cells, ate meat at least three times a week, and practised no great austerities. Their habit was white, with a scapular and pointed capuce.

JERONOMITES

Some reference must now be made to the various congregations of *Hieronomites* (Jeronomites), all of which began as hermits, but eventually abandoned the solitary life. Their origin is nearly as obscure as that of the Carmelites. There have been so many religious congregations which have taken St. Jerome as their patron, that it is difficult to say which of them is the oldest. Taking Italy alone, there are the congregations of *Pisa*, *Fiesole*, and *Lombardy*. As to Spain, Helyot devotes several pages to trying to unravel the origins of the hermits of St. Jerome in that country, but the records are obscure and contradictory. However, the generally accepted story is, that early in the fourteenth century, a certain bishop named Tomasuccio lived as a hermit somewhere in the Alps, surrounded by a band of followers. One day he had

a vision in which he saw the Holy Ghost descending on Spain, which he took to be a sign that he and his disciples were to go there. So they left their Alpine hermitage, and set off for Spain, where they eventually



SPANISH JERONIMITE
HERMIT

made two foundations, one at Villaescua, near Orusco, on the River Taxuna, the other at Nuestra Señora de Castañel, near Toledo. Their numbers increased rapidly. More foundations were made, and some of the hermits settled in Portugal.

Among those who joined them was Pedro Fernando Pecha, Bishop of Jaen. Owing to his efforts to secure ecclesiastical approval for the congregation he has often been looked upon as their founder. In 1370 the hermits took possession of the sanctuary of San Bartolomé di Lupiana. Then trouble arose. They were accused of heretical tendencies.

An appeal was made to Rome, and when at last papal approval of the congregation had been obtained, they decided to abandon the eremitical life for the cenobitic. The hermitage of St. Bartolomé was transferred into a monastery. The later history of the Spanish and Portuguese Jeronimites is outside the scope of this book. But it is of interest to mention that they obtained possession of many famous shrines, including that of Our Lady of Guadéloupe and the Escorial

and that of Belem in Portugal. The habit of the Jeronomites is white with a brown scapular.

The congregation of *Blessed Peter of Pisa* owes its origin to a member of the noble family of Gambacorti.

From his earliest childhood he had been devoted to solitude.

In 1375, at the age of twenty-five, he decided to leave the world altogether, and put on the garb of a penitent. He wandered into Umbria, whence, having crossed into the Marches of Ancona, he eventually settled on a wooded mountain called Montebello, overlooking the Adriatic. He lived on alms, going daily into the surrounding villages to collect food. Disciples joined him, and later they built a small oratory, dedicated to the Holy Trinity, around which were grouped their cells. Two of the earliest disciples of Peter of Pisa, Pietro Gualcerano, and



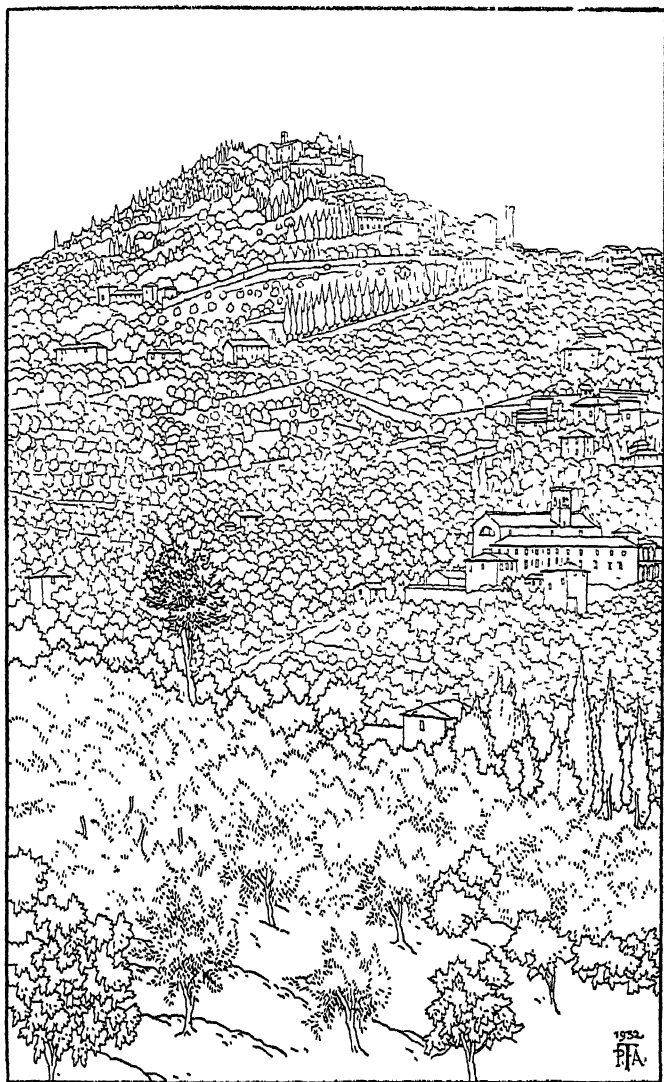
JERONIMITE HERMIT OF
BLESSED PETER OF PISA

Bartolemeo Malerba di Cesena, were beatified. The founder himself had a horror of riches and honours, and would never allow himself to be called by his family name of Gambacorti. He had a great devotion to St. Jerome, his patron, who had lived as a hermit in Syria.

From the chronicles of the congregation we gather that the life of these hermits at Montebello was one

of incredible austerity. They wore hair-shirts, underwent "disciplines," and observed much fasting. Their food consisted of little more than bread, fruit, and vegetables. In winter, three hours daily were devoted to mental prayer; in summer, two. Owing, however, to the persecution and the calumnies of the surrounding population, Blessed Peter of Pisa was obliged to appeal to Pope Martin V, who eventually gave his approbation to their rule in 1421. The congregation spread to other places in the north of Italy. At the death of the founder in 1435 they possessed hermitages near Venice, Pesaro, Fano, Padua, and Urbino. Later on they settled in the Tyrol and Bavaria. Despite the fact that they abandoned the solitary life after a while, their observances retained much of the primitive austerity of their founder's rules. Readers who are familiar with Italy will remember the famous Roman monastery of this congregation at S. Onofrio, on the Janiculum, and also that of S. Sebastiano at Venice.

Another Italian congregation, originally eremitical in character, was that of *Fiesole*, founded by Carlo di Montegraneli, a Florentine youth of noble family. Becoming a Franciscan Tertiary he withdrew with a companion into a solitary place on the side of a hill just below the town of Fiesole, which at that period was little more than a small village. Here they lived an austere life, their days and nights being spent in prayer and penance. Their diet consisted chiefly of bread and vegetables. They wore hair-shirts next their skin, scourged themselves frequently, and practised many other mortifications. Their manner of life attracted no small attention, and the silence of their hermitage was often disturbed by visitors from



FIESOLE

Florence. Among these was Cosmo di Medici, who built them a church dedicated to St. Jerome. To-day it serves as the chapel for the English nursing sisters of the Little Company of Mary (generally known as



JERONOMITE HERMIT, CONGREGATION OF FIESOLE

the "Blue Nuns"), who now occupy the old monastery of the Jeronomite hermits at Fiesole. From its windows there is a wonderful view across the valley of the Arno, with the domes and towers of Florence far below. Fra Carlo di Montegraneli lived to see his congregation spread to other places in Italy. He died at Venice in 1417 on his way to the Holy Land. Pope Eugenius IV gave them the Rule of St. Augustine in 1441. In 1460 the hermits of Fiesole changed their habit to grey, instead of wearing that of the

Third Order of St. Francis as hitherto. As a result the congregation split up into two divisions. It was finally suppressed by Pope Clement IX in 1608.

There were other Jeronomite congregations of hermits, of which lack of space forbids me to give more than a brief description. They include the following:

- (1) *Hermits of Fra Pietro di Malerba*. They lived

in the dioceses of Padua and Verona and were affiliated to the Congregation of Blessed Peter of Pisa in 1531.

(2) *Hermits of Monte Segesta*. Founded by a certain Fra Lorenzo in the fourteenth century near Genoa, and united with the congregation of Blessed Peter of Pisa in 1579.

(3) *Hermits of Bavaria and the Tyrol*, formed into a congregation in 1695; also those of *Ratisbon* (1769).

In addition to these may be mentioned:

(1) *Hermits of Fra Angelo di Corsica*, who belonged to the Third Order of St. Francis and of whom very little is known.

(2) *Hermits of Blessed Nicolo di Paleno*, who also followed the Rule of St. Francis, and whose chief settlements were near Naples. The founder died in 1448.

Much could be written of the lives of the innumerable solitaries who lived apart from any congregation in every part of Europe during the Middle Ages and until the close of the eighteenth century. They were specially numerous in France, Spain, and Italy. In earlier times they were subject to no authority save that of their parish priest or their diocesan bishop. Later, however, Pope Benedict XIV (*Syn. Dioc.* vi, 3, n. 6) laid down that all those wishing to lead the solitary life had to come under one of the following categories:

(1) Those who had taken the three monastic vows in some religious Order approved by the Church, e.g. the Camaldolesi, Augustinians, Carthusians, or the Carmelites.

(2) Those who lived in common with a Rule approved by the bishop of the diocese.

(3) Those who, without vows or community life,

adopted a peculiar habit with the approval of the diocesan bishop, and were by him deputed to the service of a church or oratory.

(4) Those who, without any ecclesiastical authority, adopted the habit of hermits—*habiticus eremiticus*—and lived under no title.

Of the more celebrated congregations of female solitaires, e.g. *Camaldolesi* and *Carthusians*, we have written in other chapters. The other orders of women who were connected with the eremitical orders cannot definitely be classed as "solitary," since they lived together in convents.

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CHAPTER IX

MEDIEVAL SOLITARIES IN ENGLAND

THE whole question of the eremitical life in England during the Middle Ages has been dealt with in an exhaustive manner by such authors as Miss Rotha M. Clay¹ and Miss F. M. Steele,² not to mention the various indefatigable editors of the works of Richard Rolle. The information given in this chapter is largely based on their respective works.

It is sometimes forgotten in these days how widespread in England was the solitary life previous to the Reformation. In fact, there was not a single county throughout the length and breadth of the country which did not boast one or more recluse's cell. From the statistical tables given at the end of Miss Clay's *Hermits and Anchorites of England*, one learns that there is evidence of at least 750 cells, and that the actual names of over 650 anchorites and hermits have been discovered. And probably since that book was written further research has increased these figures. As in other parts of Europe, so too in England, the individual solitaries, i.e. exclusive of those who lived in semi-eremitical communities such as the Carthusians, were divided into two classes—anchorites and hermits. The former were literally enclosed within four walls, i.e. recluses in the strict sense of the word.

¹ *The Hermits and Anchorites of England*.

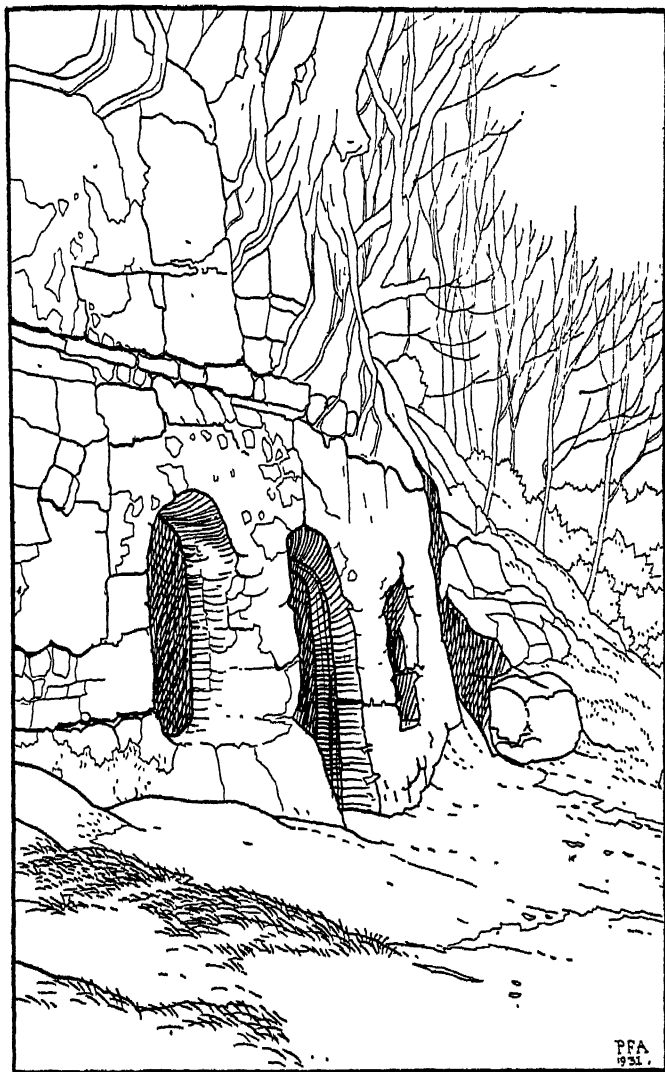
² *Anchoresses of the West*.

The latter retained their liberty to leave their cells and mix with the outer world from time to time.

The anchorites or anchoresses were men or women who were set apart from their fellow-creatures so that they might give themselves to a life of prayer without those distractions which would be inevitable if they remained living with their families. In many cases they were also looked upon as spiritual advisers. A hermit, on the contrary, had greater freedom of action and a wider sphere of activity. Sometimes he taught or preached, took charge of shrines or chapels, collected alms, cleaned forests and waste places, or acted as a bridge or lighthouse keeper. To quote Miss Clay: "Hermits were the pioneers of philanthropic works which in these days are undertaken and carried out by public bodies."

In Chapter II reference was made to the solitary life in Ireland and Wales during the fifth and sixth centuries. Traditions exist of eremitical life in England at an even earlier period; for instance, we read of two anchorites at Caerleon who were martyred under Diocletian. The Venerable Bede mentions that a hermit was the oracle of the ancient British Church when its representatives conferred with St. Augustine and his monks. Among almost contemporary solitaries were Kenneth the Prince, Elgar the kidnapped slave, and Caine the fifth-century anchoress who lived on the banks of the Avon in Somerset.

There were many Saxon hermits—Cuthbert, Guthlac, Plegmund, Dunstan, Aleot, and Wulstan—to mention but a few. But it was not until after the twelfth century that the eremitical life became widespread throughout England. For the next three



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DALE HERMITAGE

hundred years the solitary life became part of the normal religious activity in this country. In the twelfth century we meet such men and women as Godric of Finchale, the sea-roving adventurer turned hermit; Christina of the wood, the holy anchoress; Wulfric of Haselbury, the Dorset hermit; Roger, the solitary of Markyate; Bartholomew of Farne Island—whose names were household words among their contemporaries.

Then who can forget such later solitaries as Richard Rolle of Hampole, Robert of Knaresborough, Dame Juliana of Norwich, and Margery Kempe—the two latter both anchoresses in Norfolk? What respect was not paid to those who had embraced the solitary life in medieval England! In the *Liber Vitæ* of Durham Cathedral, anchorites and anchoresses give precedence only to royal benefactors, and are ranked above abbots and other ecclesiastical dignitaries.

Our forefathers looked upon the life of an anchorite as a “living death”—i.e. a life hidden with Christ in God. “We shall perhaps realize more what an extraordinary form of the religious life it was,” writes Miss F. M. Steele in her *Anchoresses of the West*, “if we try to imagine a modern English girl of twenty, or a widow of maturer age, living alone, immured in a cell adjoining some church, the entrance bricked up, one window looking into the church, and another small window through which food could be passed looking into the churchyard, and the occupant under a solemn vow never to leave this cell alive. If we suppose for a moment that such a manner of living would be permitted in these days,¹ we cannot conceive it possible

¹ *Note by author.*—In certain cases, we understand that it has been permitted.

that any woman, at any rate in this country, would be found willing to embrace it. Yet, although it was never a popular form of asceticism, there were found in this same England of ours in medieval times fair young English girls, differing outwardly but little from those of the twentieth century, who of their own free will were enclosed in a small cell, in the bloom of youth, with the firm purpose of never leaving it till they were carried to the grave. If we could ask any of these anchoresses, as they were called, what moved them to embrace such a life, their answer would be '*Caritas Christi urget nos.*'" (It can be mentioned here that a number of curious stories are still extant regarding the medieval practice of "immuring" an anchoress—that it was a form of torture or death as a punishment for some serious offence or sin against religion, and so on. These conceptions are, of course, quite erroneous.)

And the same could be said of almost every other European country previous to the sixteenth century. In all of them were to be found anchorites and anchoresses. In medieval England various names were given to the recluses—"ancre" was of common gender; "anker" and "ancrese" being used later. Their cells might be situated either adjoining parish churches, in monasteries, or adjacent to chapels, neither parochial nor definitely monastic.

With reference to the first-mentioned category, the author of the *Ancren Riwe* playfully refers to a recluse as being "anchored under the church as an anchor under a ship, to hold the ship so that neither waves nor storms might overwhelm it." She is also compared to a night fowl dwelling under the eaves of a

church, "at night on the wing, seeking heavenly food"; likewise to a sparrow, "chirping and chattering its prayers."

The permission of the bishop of the diocese was always required for enclosing an anchorite or an anchoress. The applicant had to submit to a careful examination from the bishop and other ecclesiastical



WARKWORTH HERMITAGE

personages before permission was granted to embrace this form of the solitary life. The actual ceremony of enclosure was generally performed by the bishop himself. A bishop was responsible for all the anchorites in his diocese, except those who were directly subject to the abbot of an exempt monastery. A number of liturgical forms for enclosing anchorites have been preserved. One of the earliest of these is to be found in a twelfth-century Pontifical in the British Museum,

entitled *Ad recludendum Anchoritam*. Similar offices are provided in the Exeter Pontifical of Bishop Lacy (1420-55), the Sarum Manual (1506), and the York Pontifical of Archbishop Bainbridge (1508-14).

Miss R. M. Clay gives careful summaries of these different Offices, the following being descriptive of the "Order of enclosing servants or hand-maidens of God according to the Use of Sarum." It provided that the candidate, before being admitted to the cell, should fast and make his confession, and should keep vigil throughout the preceding night. On the morrow the bishop or his commissary made an exhortation to the people and to the one who was about to be enclosed, and the Office opened with Versicles and Psalms. The celebrant began Mass, which included a special collect. After the gospel the "includendus," having offered a lighted wax taper to the priest, which was then placed on the altar, stood on the altar-steps and read his profession, after placing the form on the altar, having made the sign of the Cross on it in ink. The habit was then blessed and the newly-professed person clothed in it. Whilst he lay prostrate before the altar, the *Veni Creator* was chanted. The Mass over, all present, including the newly-clothed recluse who bore a lighted candle, went in procession to the cell. The bishop, taking the novice by the hand, led him or her to the threshold of the cell. The whole place having been solemnly blessed, the recluse was led into the cell and left alone. The door was closed and locked; a few more prayers were recited, the procession returned to the church, and the solitary now found himself utterly alone.

The Exeter Office is compiled on similar lines to

that of Sarum, except that, after the recluse had been led into the cell, the bishop administered to him the rite of Extreme Unction, together with the commendation of the soul, lest the solitary should be overtaken by sudden death. Dust was scattered with the words: "From dust wast thou created, etc." Before leaving, the bishop gave a final sermon, and the door of the cell was built up.

Some five rules of life, specially written for recluses in England, have come down to us. They are: (1) the *Rule of St. Aelred of Rievaulx—Regula, Informatio* or *Institutio Inclusarum* (to be found in Holstenius' *Codex Regularum* in Migne's Latin Patrology); (2) the *Ancren Riwe*; (3) the *Form of Perfect Living*, written by Richard Rolle for Dame Margaret Kirby; (4) the *Scale of Perfection*, by Walter Hilton; (5) *Book for Recluses*, found in the British Museum, Harleian M.S. 2372.

The *Rule of St. Aelred* (1109-66), was written by the saint for his sister, who had long besought him for some such form of living, and who seems to have been an anchoress enclosed in a Cistercian convent.

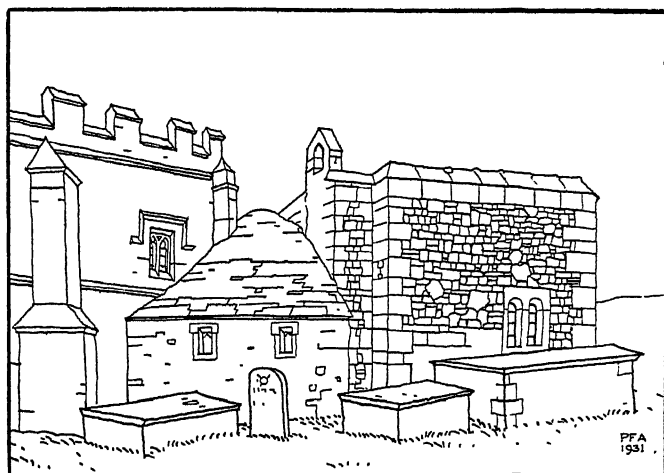
The *Ancren Riwe*, written in the thirteenth century, is of uncertain authorship, but seems to have been compiled for some anchoresses at Tarrent in Dorset.

The *Form of Perfect Living*, written by Richard Rolle of Hampole in Yorkshire for his friend Margaret Kirby, who had forsaken "the solace and joy of this world and taken to solitary life," dates from the fourteenth century, but it is more of a spiritual treatise than an actual Rule. So also is the *Scale of Perfection* by Walter Hilton, likewise written in the

fourteenth century, and addressed to a woman "closid in a hous."

The *Book for Recluses* is a fifteenth-century MS. containing advice on reasons for embracing a solitary life, together with prayers, meditations, and sacramental teaching.

It is not difficult to reconstruct in imagination the



ANCHORITE'S CELL, LLANEILIAN, ANGLESEY

main features of the daily life of a medieval anchorite in England. Unlike hermits, they could not support themselves, and before enclosing an anchorite, a bishop had to make sure that sufficient means were forthcoming to provide for his upkeep. In some places anchorites received a definite allowance from municipal or civic funds, either in money or in kind. For instance, the anchoress of Iffley, just outside Oxford, received an annual allowance of a hundred shillings,

and additional gifts of oak logs for her fire, supplemented by smaller presents from individual benefactors.

The food of an anchorite or an anchoress was mainly vegetarian. They could have soups or "pottages" made of herbs, peas, or beans; or "furmity," sweetened with milk, butter, or oil, and fish seasoned with apples or herbs.

They fasted on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. During Lent only bread and water was eaten on Fridays, and only one dish of food on other days. No meat or lard was allowed except in case of sickness. The one meal of the day was at noon, except in Lent, when it was postponed until after the hour of Vespers. In *Piers Plowman* (Chap. VI), Langland says he will not give alms except to those anchorites who eat after Nones and only once a day.

Those anchorites dependent on a monastery received a fixed allowance of food and clothing at the expense of the community. At St. Albans, Whalley, and Worcester there are references to the allowances of food given to the anchorites. At Whalley they seem to have been treated generously. A weekly eight gallons of beer (for three anchorites), and on All Saints an allowance of ten large stock fish, one bushel of oatmeal, and one bushel of rye are included. They also received oil, turves, and faggots for lighting and warming their cells. In fact, the majority of the anchorites and anchoresses in medieval England, whatever may have been the privations in other directions, seem to have lived comfortably enough. But in the *Ancren Riwele* the recluse is warned not to grumble at her meat and drink if it were stale. If it were really uneatable she might ask for something more, but the

request must be made tactfully, lest men should say: "This anchoress is dainty, and she asks much." Only sheer distress should oblige her to make such a request. If there were anything left over from her meals, the anchoress should give it away to any poor women or children who had done her service.

Great emphasis is laid on avoiding waste, untidiness, and neglect of household duties. Faults to be confessed included: "Dropping crumbs, or spilling ale, or letting a thing grow mouldy, or rusty, or rotten; clothes not sewed, wet with rain, or unwashen; a cup or a dish broken, or anything carelessly looked after in use." (R. M. Clay, *op. cit.*, p. 105.)

No special form of habit seems to have been prescribed for anchorites or anchoresses, although the latter are told in the *Ancren Riwele* to see they are "plain, and warm, and well-made—skins well tawed; and have as many as you need, for bed and also for back." Underclothing had to be of woollen material or coarse linen; shoes thick and warm, but in hot weather the anchoresses might go barefoot. They were forbidden to wear rings, brooches, ornamented girdles or gloves.

Presumably the male anchorite wore some form of clerical clothing, or else the habit of a religious order.

Recluses often received gifts of clothes, if one can judge by contemporary documents; thus the anchorite at Holy Trinity, Lincoln, once received from a rich benefactor a "tunic furred with calaber" with a double hood, and a cloak furred with "gris," and a priest at Lynn bequeathed to the local "anker"—"the red cloth that lyeth on my bed," not to mention a "blak vestment and a blak clothe steyned with an ymage

of deth." In matters of personal cleanliness considerable liberty was allowed to the individual solitary, but one rule directs: "Wash yourselves as often as ye please." Another quotes a saying of St. Bernard: "I haue louyd pouerte but y neuer louyd fylth" (R. M. Clay, op. cit., p. 108).

As to property, anchorites were not encouraged to hold superfluous worldly goods, lest it led to avarice and covetousness. In the *Ancren Riwele* we read:

"Ye shall not possess any beast, my dear sisters, except only a cat. An anchoress that hath cattle appeareth as Martha was, a better housewife than anchoress; nor can she in any wise be Mary, with peacefulness of heart. For then she must think of her cow's fodder, and of the herdsman's hire, flatter the heyward, defend herself when her cattle is shut up in the pinfold, and moreover pay for the damage. Christ knoweth, it is an odious thing when people in the town complain of anchoresses' cattle. If, however, any one must needs have a cow, let her take care that she neither annoy nor harm any one, and that her own thoughts be not fixed thereon."

It seems that in the later Middle Ages, anchorites and anchoresses were often tempted to live in extreme comfort, owing to the alms so generously bestowed by benefactors.

In earlier times anchorites were buried in their cells, in tombs already prepared by themselves. The *Ancren Riwele* refers to this custom, bidding the anchoress not only to meditate daily upon death, but to scrape up earth every day out of the pit, so that "she hath her death always, in a manner, before her eyes." There are a certain number of anchorites' tombs still to be

seen up and down England, notably at St. John's, Lewes, Lower Quinton, Gloucestershire, and Faversham.

Let us now pass on to the trials and temptations that were the necessary part of an anchorite's vocation; that "single-handed combat of the wilderness against the vices of the flesh and their evil thoughts" to which St. Benedict refers in the first chapter of his Rule.

Mother Juliana, the anchoress of Norwich, reminds her fellow solitaries: "He said not: 'Thou shalt not be tempested, thou shalt not be travailed, thou shalt not be afflicted,' but He said: 'Thou shalt not be overcome,'" and the medieval solitaries of both sexes sought to discipline themselves until all the desires of their lower nature were brought into subjection, and their whole personality transformed. The author of the *Ancren Riwele* reminds his readers that bodily discipline is necessary for them.

"Let not any one handle herself too gently, lest she deceive herself. She will not be able, for her life, to keep herself pure, nor to maintain herself aright in chastity without two things, as St. Ailred wrote to his sister. The one is, giving pain to the flesh by fasting, by watching, by flagellations, by wearing coarse garments, by a hard bed, with sickness, with much labour. The other thing is the moral qualities of the heart, as devotion, compassion, mercy, pity, charity, humility, and other virtues of this kind. . . . Yet many anchoresses, more is the harm, are of such fleshly wisdom, and so exceedingly afraid lest their head ache, and lest their body should be too much enfeebled, and are so careful of their health, that the spirit is weakened and sickeneth in sin."

One of the greatest temptations to which anchoresses were exposed was that of gossiping at their windows; the extreme monotony of their existence making them eager for any distraction or diversion. "Wherefore, my dear sisters," writes the author of the *Ancren Riwle*, "love your windows as little as possible; and see that they be small—the parlour's smallest and narrowest." These parlour windows were covered with cloth, black cloth with a white cross upon it, and this cloth was to be two-fold and the cross on both sides; the white cross being appropriate to white and unstained maiden purity.

St. Aelred warns his sister of the many dangers of the solitary life she has adopted. For instance, of the old woman who, hoping for alms, comes as a messenger, and whispers soft words in her ears. Bad women will come as well as good, and having uttered a few pious phrases will soon pass on to secular matters: even scandalous and evil gossip. Hence constant vigilance was needed. "Surely our foe, the warrior of hell, shoots, as I wean, more bolts at one anchoress than at seventy and seven secular ladies." But there were other and more subtle and insidious temptations to be combated: ostentatious piety, depression, doubt, and apathy—all those manifestations of "accidie," the besetting sin of all cloistered religious, due to overwrought nerves and the strain of a life in which no relaxation is possible. Then lastly, there were the trials of illness and disease. When we read Mother Juliana's *Revelations of Divine Love* we understand something of what Englishwomen of the Middle Ages could endure when sickness attacked them in the solitude of an "ankerhold." Yet Mother Juliana had

often longed and prayed for some such illness that she might understand better what were the sufferings of Christ, but she afterwards confessed: "If I had wist what pain it should be, I had been loth to have prayed."

Sometimes two or more women lived together as anchoresses; a state of existence perhaps even more difficult than absolute solitude, since it must have been hard to avoid the natural inclinations to ill-temper, suspicion, and pettiness which such a confined life would seem to encourage. It was the general custom for an anchorite or an anchoress to have a servant to attend to their external needs. The servant might be either a man or a woman. Katherine, the fifteenth-century solitary of St. Albans, had a manservant named Philip Gerard, while Christina of Markyate, in Bedfordshire, had her handmaid, Doet. In some instances, we hear of anchoresses' servants succeeding their mistresses after their death.

St. Aelred thus describes the requisite qualifications for an anchoress's maid. "First chese an honest womman in lyvyng, no jangler, ne royler aboute, noo chider, noo tidynges teller, but such oon, that may have witnesse of hir good conversaycon and honesty. Hir charge shal be to kepe thyn household and thy lyfod, to close thy dores, and to resceyue that shoulde be resceyved, and to voide that shuld be avoided. Under hir governaile shuld she have a yonger womman of age, to bere gretter charges, in fettyng of wode, and water, and sethyng, and greithyng, of mete and drynke. And that she be ouerlooked under gret awe." (Bodleian MS. 423, f. 179, quoted by F. M. Clay, *op. cit.*, p. 132.)

Sometimes anchoresses were tempted to enliven the monotony of their lives by teaching. St. Aelred strongly condemns the practice.

"Let not girls and boys approach thee. There are some recluses who undertake the teaching of girls and turn their cell into a school. She sits at the window and they settle down in the porch. She watches them one by one, and according as each behaves, now she is angry, now she laughs, now she threatens, now she beats them, now she coaxes them, now she kisses them, now calls a weeping child to come nearer to be beaten, she strokes her face, she draws up her head, and eagerly embracing her, calls her now daughter, now darling." (Aelred, cap. vi.) The one regular visitor received by an anchoress was her confessor, who was always chosen with special care.

Both men and women recluses had great difficulty in preventing worldly-minded people from coming and gossiping with them, and it was difficult for them to know when to break off such conversations without being discourteous.

"When you have to go to your parlour window," says the author of the *Ancred Riwle*, "learn from your maid who it is that is come; for it may be someone whom you ought to shun. Say first *Confiteor*, and then *Benedicite*, which he ought to say; hear his words, and sit quite still, that when he parteth from you he may not know either good or evil of you . . . (for otherwise) when he is gone away, he will say, 'This anchoress is a great talker.'"

In cases of great necessity a recluse might leave his or her cell. For instance Matilda, the anchoress of St. Peter's, Leicester, was stated to be "infected

with the pestiferous contagion of heretics and Lollards." So she was taken out and carefully examined by the bishop, and having retracted any unorthodox opinions she might have held, was walled up again in her cell. Another interesting case of an anchoress being allowed to change her abode, is that of Margaret of Bodmin, who obtained her bishop's permission to leave her cell in order to join the newly-founded community of Bridgettine nuns at Sheen.

We owe some of the most remarkable religious literature to the two Norfolk anchoresses, Margery Kempe of Lynn, and Juliana of Norwich. The latter's *Revelations of Divine Love* have deservedly taken their place among the classics of medieval mysticism. But there were other literary recluses, including Thomas Scrope, the Carmelite anchorite of Norwich; the historian Geoffrey, "recluse of the Friars Preachers" of Lynn, who compiled the first English-Latin dictionary in 1440; George Ripley, another Carmelite anchorite whose writings on alchemy were widely studied in the Middle Ages; Symon, "the anker of London Wall," who published a book of pious meditations early in the fifteenth century—to mention but a few.

Lastly, both anchorites and anchoresses were always regarded as prophets and counsellors, occupying in medieval England a position not unlike that held by the Old Testament prophets in Israel. The recluse looked upon himself as indeed a real follower of "John Baptist, prince of hermits after Christ" (as Richard Rolle calls him). Even in the *Morte d'Arthur* we read how Sir Percival, anxious for news of a certain knight, goes to the cell of an anchoress and knocks at her

little window. The anchoress, on hearing his name, opens the window and gives him ghostly counsel. And there are many other references to hermits and solitaries throughout the Celtic legends. Godric, on his little island off the coast of Northumberland, had a great reputation for his psychic powers and his gift of prophecy. The same clairvoyant gifts were possessed by a thirteenth-century anchoress of St. Albans, who is described as a "most holy recluse, who was accustomed to see not simply dreams but heavenly signs of the future." Once she had a vision of a venerable-looking man ascending the tower of a church, turning towards the town, and pronouncing repeatedly the ominous words: "Woe, woe, woe, to all the inhabitants of the earth."

"And soon, in the same year, on account of the failure of the crops, the herds also died, and so great a famine ensued that in the city of London, 15,000 souls perished of hunger. In various by-ways, indeed, folk fell down, and died miserably. And so great was their number that the grave-diggers for very weariness threw many bodies in a heap into a single pit." (R. M. Clay, *op. cit.*, p. 149.)

There were other recluses at St. Albans who were famed for their gifts of prophecy, including Roger the hermit, whom one of the old chronicles describes as the "friend of God who taught Christina almost incredible things of the secrets of heaven, for his body alone seemed to remain on earth, his soul conversing with the invisible." Wulfric of Haselbury, the Dorset anchorite, likewise possessed remarkable clairvoyant powers, predicting the death of Henry I when he was arranging to depart for France. Robert, the recluse

of Knaresborough, boldly rebuked King John who once visited him. The anchorites of Westminster had a great reputation as spiritual advisers, and were the counsellors of more than one English king. And the same applies to other recluses, notably a certain anchoress of York, Dame Emma Rawghton, who informed Henry VI that it had been revealed to her by Our Lady that he ought to be crowned in France as well as in England.

We must now pass on to say something about the hermits of medieval England as distinct from the anchorites.

It is not so easy to define the exact position of the hermit in the ecclesiastical system of medieval England, for his life had not the same definite and prescribed character as that of the strict recluse; the sphere of his influence was wider. The hermit could be either priest or layman. All that was essential was to obtain the approval of the bishop to adopt such a life and to secure "letters testimonial." Hermits were clothed in a habit, made some kind of profession, like a monk, and received a charge as to their future manner of living.

They followed various written rules, or none—according to individual circumstances. The written rules include the following:

(1) *Regula Heremitarum*, sometimes ascribed to Richard Rolle (Cambridge MS.).

(2) *De paupertate, statu, et vita Heremitarum* (Bodleian MS., fourteenth century).

(3) The so-called *Rule of Pope Linus* (Lambeth MS., fifteenth century).

(4) The so-called *Rule of Pope Celestine* (similar in character to No. 3).

As compared with monastic rules these hermits' rules show that an extraordinary amount of liberty was allowed as regards details of observance. "The hermit should make obedience to God alone," says one of them, "because he himself is abbot, prior, and prefect in the cloister of his heart." He might, if he chose, make a vow of poverty and chastity before a bishop, but even this was not obligatory. But the hermit had to observe certain definite times of prayer and hear Mass daily if possible. It is interesting to note that when a certain hermit, Adam Cressewill, had married one Margaret, Archbishop Arundel judged that the reception of a hermit's habit did not involve an express "profession of religion," nor preclude any subsequent "marriage which was instituted in Paradise." (Lambeth, *Reg. Arundel*, I, f. 438, h.)

So popular was the eremitical life in medieval England, and so greatly did it appeal to the individualistic temperament of the average Englishman, that we constantly come across references to self-constituted or wandering solitaries, who had taken up the life without going to the trouble of obtaining parochial, monastic, or episcopal approval. And the Church had much trouble in dealing with this type of solitary free-lance. Not infrequently even beggars found it advantageous to pose as hermits. For instance, in 1412 we read that "William Blakeney, *shetilmaker* . . . was brought into the Guildhall . . . for that, whereas, he was able to work for his food and raiment, he . . . went about there, barefooted and with long hair, under the guise of sanctity, and pretended to be a hermit, saying that he was such, and that he had made pilgrimage . . . and under the colour of falsehood he

had received many good things from divers people." (H. Riley, *Memorials*, p. 584.)

Indeed, the wish to live a roving life seems to have been the reason for many individuals taking up the calling of a hermit. For instance, William Home, an apostate monk, obtained from Cardinal Wolsey permission to live an eremitical life. It happened that he wanted to become a necromancer, and used to dig for hidden treasure and practise spirit-raising. In fact, hermits were sometimes rather a nuisance to both the ecclesiastical and civil authorities of pre-Reformation England.

Most of the earlier hermits used to support themselves by tilling the soil, their food consisting of vegetables grown by themselves. But in certain instances hermits had no fixed abode; for example, Richard Rolle, who spent most of his life wandering from place to place, living on alms, and often suffering from hunger and thirst. But Godric of Finchale and Robert of Knaresborough, two other North-country hermits, had their little gardens, the former refusing any gifts of food offered to him by benefactors. The latter had, in addition, two horses, two cows and two oxen.

In an old manuscript (Bodleian, *Rawlinson* MS., c. 72), we read that: "if a hermit dwells in a borough, town, or city, or nigh thereto, where each day he can well beg his daily food, let him before sunset distribute to Christ's poor that which remains of his food. But if he abides afar, as in a country village, or a desert spot one or two miles from the abode of men, let him make provision for one week strictly from Sunday to Sunday, or he may begin on another day of the week;

and if aught remains over, let it be given to the poor forthwith, unless on some ground he can excuse himself in the sight of God, as that he is sick or weak, or that he is tending a sick man, or is busy at home with works bodily or spiritual which are well pleasing to God."

Some kind of distinctive dress was considered essential by every hermit, no matter how much of a "free-lance" he might be. For instance, Richard Rolle, when he fled from home, asked his sister to give him two of her old tunics, one white, the other grey, also one of his father's cloaks. These he put on, "so that, in some measure, he might present a confused likeness to a hermit."

As a general rule, it was the bishop who decided on the type of a hermit's dress. The main idea was that it should not resemble too closely that of any existing religious order, yet be distinctive. It was usually dark in colour, with a cord round the waist.

Strict poverty was not regarded as an essential part of the eremitical vocation, and many hermits owned property in addition to the actual cells in which they dwelt. In some cases they were widowers, or even married men living apart from their wives.

The life of a hermit did not mean the abandonment of all human intercourse, as was the case with the anchorite. Indeed, hermits as a rule were very much in touch with their fellow-men. More often than not, two or three hermits lived together in adjacent cells. St. Robert of Knaresborough had a companion and several servants who shared his labours. Godric of Finchale in his old age had both his nephew and a priest living with him. Sometimes the relations

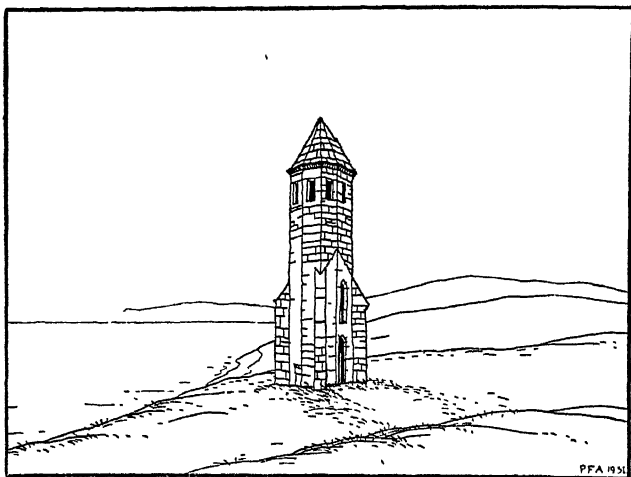
between hermits living together were not quite so happy as they should be. Bartholomew of Farne Island seems to have found it so difficult to keep on friendly terms with his companion, Thomas, ex-prior of Durham, that in despair he retired himself to that monastery for the period of a whole year. "Perhaps a little social intercourse had done good to the lonely monk, whilst an interval of unbroken solitude may have refreshed the harassed ex-prior, worn out with governing a large community. At any rate, it proved on Bartholomew's return that a transformation had taken place, and henceforth the two men lived 'in complete tranquillity both of tongue and soul.' " (R. M. Clay, *op. cit.*, p. 129.)

No doubt it was largely because of their genial and friendly dispositions that hermits were so loved in medieval England. Richard Rolle was accustomed to be "all things to all men," going in and out of houses, and eating and drinking with the people. But on the other hand, more than one Rule lays stress on the stipulation that a hermit ought not to run about the country on errands, but send a servant, lest "by unlawful wandering or straying he might lose devotion by negligence."

The names of many famous writers are to be found among the English hermits—Gildas, Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, Plegmund, Dunstan, Godric of Finchale, Simon Stock, Richard Rolle, and Walter Hilton—to mention but a few.

Before ending this chapter, reference must be made to the various classes of hermits existing in pre-Reformation England. First there were those who lived in towns and cities. Strange as it may seem

to modern readers, there were London hermits living in Aldgate, Bishopsgate, Cripplegate, and near Tower Hill. Just opposite to where Charing Cross Station now stands was the hermitage of "La Charryng." We also read of town hermitages at Chichester, Canterbury, Leicester, Durham, Ely, Coventry, Pontefract,



LIGHTHOUSE HERMITAGE ON ST. CATHERINE'S DOWN,
ISLE OF WIGHT

Bristol—to mention but a very few places. Many of these town hermits were given definite employment, such as the care of roads, bridges, and gates. Others had charge of leper-houses, gathered alms on behalf of hospitals, or acted as caretakers of churches. Priest hermits were sometimes appointed to serve chapels.

In contrast to the above class of solitary we have the hermits living in forests and the depths of the countryside. This was the more normal setting for

the eremitical life, and it would take too long to give the names of all the cells scattered up and down the length of England. A complete list of them can be found in the appendices to Miss Clay's *Hermits and Anchorites of England*.

Another distinct class of solitaries were the cave-dwellers. There are still to be seen numerous caverns and grottoes hidden in valleys or in exposed places in rocky cliffs, once the homes of hermits. Famous among them are: Anchor Church, near Repton, Guy's Cliff, near Warwick, Bridgenorth, Knaresborough, Dale Hermitage, Derbyshire, Pontefract, Warkworth, and Clifton.

Miss Clay devoted a whole chapter of her book to "Highways and Bridge Hermits"—i.e. solitaries who devoted their lives to ministering to the needs of travellers, acting as guides, taking care of bridges, mending roads and causeways (e.g. across the Fens). There were also the lighthouse keepers who lived in solitude on the cliffs overlooking the sea, maintained beacons and acted as coast guards. All round the coasts of the British Isles we still find traces of this class of hermit, who devoted his life to "help Christians exposed to the dangers of the sea, so that they may be brought into the haven out of the waves of the deep" (*Patent Roll*. 1247).

Beacon lights were in the care of hermits at the following places: Tynemouth, Coquet and Farne Islands, Ilfracombe, St. Ives, Lynn, Hunstanton, Skegness, Reculver, South Foreland, St. Catherine's Point (Isle of Wight), St. Alban's Head (Dorset), Plymouth, and Dover.

Lastly there were the solitaries who dwelt on lonely

islands, surrounded by an expanse of sea and sky; probably the ideal retreat for hermits, where they could find undisturbed hiding-places. Among the sea-girt islands off the coasts of Britain, once the homes of hermits, are Bardsey, off the coast of Carnarvon, the Holmes, in the Severn, Farne and Coquet, off Northumberland, and Caldey, off Pembrokeshire. Other solitaries found retreats on islands in lakes, rivers, and fens, for example, Derwentwater and Windermere, Crowland, Peakirk, Bethney, Thorney, and Athelney.

The eremitical life of England came to a sudden end with the religious upheaval of the sixteenth century, just as did the monastic life. Some of the hermits and anchorites were granted pensions, but the majority were cast adrift on the world, or on the charity of friends and relations. Their cells were left to fall into ruins or sold for other purposes. But the Englishman has always retained a certain half-secret love and admiration for the solitary life, of which a typical manifestation may be found in the words of Dr. Johnson, who said he felt inclined to kneel and kiss the ground that hermits had trodden of old.

What has been written in this chapter of the lives of individual solitaries in medieval England might have been written equally well of those in other European countries, some still Catholic, others Protestant. But this would need a whole volume in itself.

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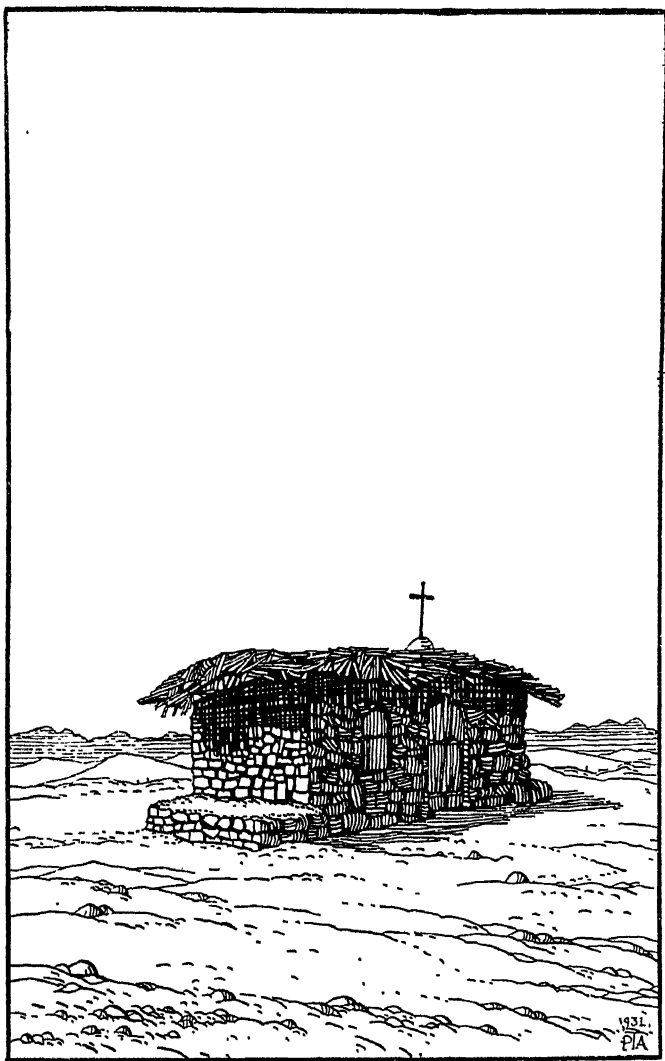
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CHAPTER X

MODERN SOLITARIES

THE famous seventeenth-century Cistercian spiritual writer, Cardinal Bona, refers to the eremitical life as follows: "Deus unus et solus est nec ipsum reperire potest qui solus non est," which may be paraphrased as: "No one can find God except he is solitary, for God Himself is alone and solitary." These words seem to afford a clue to the mystery—for so it is to many persons—of that quest of solitude throughout the ages whose history we have roughly outlined in the previous chapters of this book. The men and women of bygone ages of whom we have written would probably agree with that most ultra-modern of authors, John Cowper Powys, who says in his book *In Defence of Sensuality* (p. 107): "It is grievous how few human beings there are who make the full use that can be made of the essential loneliness of all lives. Instead of being recognized for what it is—the most divine gift of Heaven—this awareness of loneliness has come to be regarded as something from which we ought to escape as soon as possible, as something that is at once culpable and sad—a selfish animal sensation and a metaphysical horror. It is, on the contrary, the only adequate refuge from the sufferings of life, and the only enduring ground for all deep happiness. And it is as universal as it is personal."

The solitaries of all ages, no matter to what religious



CHARLES DE FOUCAULD'S HERMITAGE AT TAMANRASSET IN THE
HOGGAR

friends: "I relish the charms of solitude more and more, and I am trying to find out how to enter into a deeper and deeper solitude." Finally he left the Order, and became a servant to the Poor Clare nuns at Nazareth, where he lived in a log hut, not much larger than a sentry-box, adjoining the convent—his life "hid with Christ in God."

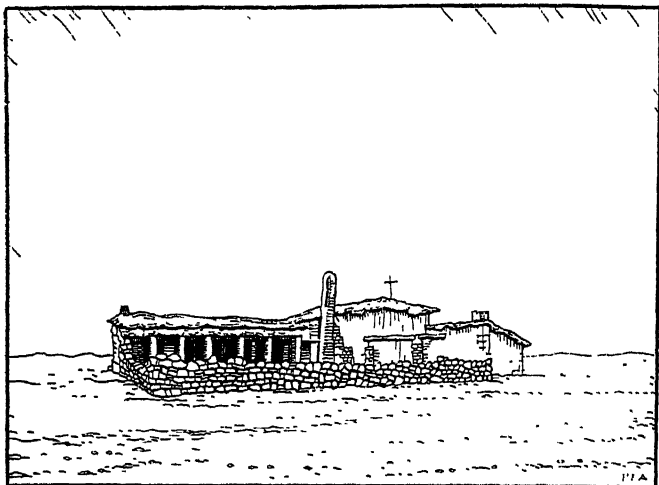
In one of his letters from Nazareth he writes: "I live in a solitary little house, situated in a close belonging to the Sisters whose happy servant I am. I am there quite alone, on the border of the little town; on one side is the Sisters' enclosure, on the other the country, fields, and hillocks; it is a delightful and perfectly solitary hermitage." He spent his days in doing odd jobs for the nuns, and long hours in prayer. For a time he removed to Jerusalem, then returned to Nazareth. At one time he dreamed of buying some ground on Mount Thabor, where he would have set up a hermitage on the summit, and there quite alone—or perhaps with a few brothers whose coming he always hoped for—he would have guarded that sacred spot (the present magnificent basilica had not then been built): "he would have adored the Blessed Sacrament, he would have received the passing Bedouins and the pilgrims who ascended in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. A contemplative, unprotected, austere, and charitable priest, he would have preached the Gospel in silence." (René Bazin, *Charles de Foucauld*, p. 131.)

But the dream did not materialize. The ecclesiastical authorities regarded him as a mere visionary and showed no sympathy. Finally he returned to France, and in 1901, on the advice of his spiritual

director, Abbé Huvelin, he was ordained priest, afterwards setting out for Africa. His first retreat was at Béni-Abbès, about three hundred miles south of Oran, one of the most beautiful of the south Algerian oases, with its groves of seven to eight thousand palm-trees, surrounded by endless stretches of rose-coloured or golden sand-dunes. Beyond the groves in another direction stretched a rocky, treeless table-land, going on apparently without end. Having bought a few acres of land on the edge of the desert, Brother Charles de Foucauld set out to build his hermitage. "It was never anything but a poor collection of earth huts, without any artistic feature, built in a ravine, and quite fragile: if they very nearly kept off the sun, they would have melted under two days' rain. Fortunately it rains barely more than once a year in the Sahara district, and some years it may not rain at all. Stones gleamed on the plateau, but chiefly bricks of dried clay were used for building; a little earth mixed with water was the mortar; porous planks of palms did duty for beams; the veins of large leaves and reeds made the roofing." (René Bazin, *ibid.*, p. 15.)

The chapel was built first, being roofed with palm beams, covered with mats of palm branches. There the nineteenth-century hermit was to spend many hours of the day and night in prayer and meditation. Until the rest of the place was built he slept fully dressed on the altar steps, lying "near the tabernacle, like a dog at his master's feet" (René Bazin, *ibid.*, p. 153). At last the hermitage was finished and an enclosure was set up by building a wall round it. Not only the soldiers of the garrison, but also the natives, soon became on friendly terms with Charles de

Foucauld, the latter regarding him as a "marabout," his reputation for holiness rendering sacred to them the hermitage and its contents. Finding that he lacked the strength to till the land of his enclosure, Brother Charles engaged two "harratins" (i.e. half-breed Arabs) and called them his gardeners. They soon became



THE HERMITAGE OF CHARLES DE FOUCAULD AT BÉNI-ABBÈS

devoted to their strange master and remained with him many years. But they could not put up with his food, for the marabout dined off a piece of barley-bread soaked in a decoction of a Saharan plant known as "desert tea," and in the evening supped on a bowl of the same tea to which he added a little condensed milk. So the "harratins" went back to the village for their meals. Occasionally the hermit would leave his solitude and accept the invitations which the officers of the garrison sent him to dine with them.

But this was not often. His vocation was silence, self-effacement, and solitude. Brother Charles was often alone for days and even months on end. No other man came to share the life of this new John the Baptist who had gone out into the desert. But he still dreamed of a future community and drew up an elaborate rule of life for use when members should arrive. After three years or so at Béni-Abbès he retired still farther into the Sahara, fixing his abode at Tamanrasset, in the heart of the Tuareg desert, about five thousand feet above the sea. His idea was to divide his time between Béni-Abbès and Tamanrasset—to become a wandering solitary with two hermitages, the friend of two neglected African races.

He made his new home on the bank of the dried-up bed of a river—a lowly group of mud huts similar to the one he had lived in at Béni-Abbès. “The beauty of the valley, its grandeur, is given by its frame of mountains, for on the north, within two or three miles of the hermitage, the solid mass of the Kudiat rises up, dominated by the Ilaman peak, ten thousand feet high, bare, heaped-up, and rocky mountains, coloured by the sun, above all towards evening, with rose or fawn, with gloomy or dark purple tints, undimmed by mist or dust. . . . At these great heights the air is of such perfect transparency as our eyes have ever seen.” (René Bazin, *ibid.*, p. 234.)

One can picture Charles de Foucauld, standing on the threshold of his hermitage, dressed in his white robe, bearing a red heart and cross on his breast. As he gazes out over the vast, unbroken, treeless landscape, no home or other sign of human habitation meets his eye. But from time to time Tuareg shepherds, guarding

herds of sheep and goats, camels and asses, would pass by and with these he made friends.

Later on the hermit found a companion, a young Breton fisherman's son who had spent three years with the White Fathers, and three years in a Zouave regiment in Africa. On hearing of Charles de Foucauld, he felt that here might be his true vocation, and he decided to join him. From his pen we have many interesting details of the life at Béni-Abbès, to which Brother Charles now returned for a while. He thus describes it:

"Here is the Rule we followed during the ten days we spent at the hermitage. As we had no lamps to light us, and were obliged to economize the wax and candles for the long and frequent liturgical ceremonies, our rising and going to bed were regulated by the sun. The father loved punctuality, and himself fulfilled the difficult office of time-keeper, assigned in most communities to the youngest and least worthy. In the morning he came and wakened me at daybreak. As we slept fully dressed, our toilet was quickly finished, and a few minutes after getting up I said the Angelus in my cell. At the sound of the bell I went to church. My superior then recited a long prayer, half in Latin, half in French, which I answered: he exposed the Blessed Sacrament, singing the *Tantum Ergo*, then celebrated holy Mass, which I served, and during which I communicated. We remained in silence and adoration for more than two hours. The thanksgiving and meditation over, the father said his breviary in a low voice, while I said some Paters and Aves. Before leaving the chapel the father gave benediction with the Blessed Sacrament and shut the holy ciborium

up in the tabernacle. About nine o'clock we went each to our work: my superior shut himself up in the sacristy, where his books and manuscripts are, and wrote letters, or worked at his dictionary of the Tuareg language, always writing, for want of a table, on a simple box. As for me, I retired to my cell, the only one that had a chimney, and which served at once as workshop, kitchen, and refectory. There I read a pious book; then I set to work, either grinding wheat between two stones, as the people of the country do, crushing dates with a pestle and mortar, baking thick flat cakes in the ashes, or cooking. At eleven o'clock we had our meal, preceded by the reading of a chapter of the New Testament and "particular examen."¹ After saying grace, the father stood up and read aloud two or three passages from a chapter of the *Imitation*; then we all sat on our mats around the saucepan placed on the ground, just off the fire, the father, our negro servant, and myself, and we ate in the greatest silence, fishing food out of the dish with a spoon, and drinking water out of the same vessel. The menu varied very little. It was composed now of a dish of rice cooked in water and, very exceptionally, with condensed milk, sometimes mixed with carrots and turnips which grow in the desert sand, sometimes with a sort of marmalade of a fairly pleasant flavour made with wheat-flour, crushed dates, and water. There were no napkins, table-cloths, plates, or knives or forks with which to eat this slight collation. We stood up at the end of a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, and after thanksgiving and grace, both went to the chapel, chanting the *Miserere*, to pay a visit

¹ i.e. a detailed examination of conscience.

to the Blessed Sacrament, and for spiritual reading in common. About two o'clock we returned, each on our own side, to our usual occupations, the father to his studies, and I to manual work. At six in the evening we had supper with only one course, like the other meal. It was taken in the same way and despatched with the same rapidity. About half-past six we went to church for mental prayer before the Blessed Sacrament exposed, then a long evening prayer, followed by Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament. We finished the day with the hymn, *Veni Creator*. Bedtime was regularly fixed by twilight, but it was always dark when we went to rest." (René Bazin, *ibid.*, p. 250.)

But the young disciple was unable to support the austerities of his master and he only remained some four months, and for the remainder of his life Charles de Foucauld was alone, save for his native servants. He spent his time partly at Tamanrasset among the Tuaregs, partly at Béni-Abbès. Twice he returned to France for short periods for the purpose of arousing interest among his countrymen in the natives of the desert, and a sense of their moral responsibility towards them. His end was a tragic one, but such as he had prayed for, asking nothing better than to lay down his life for those to whom he had devoted his earthly career. On the night of September 1st, 1916, his hermitage was surrounded by a band of armed Tuaregs. They found an entrance, and fired on the "marabout," who neither moved nor cried out. In a few moments he was dead. The assassins were a band of Moslem fanatics who thought that the hermit was a danger to the religion of the Prophet.

Thus died Charles de Foucauld, the nineteenth-century hermit of the Sahara; a monk without a monastery, a master without disciples, a penitent and a solitary, dying at the hand of the assassin before he could see the fulfilment of his fondest dream.

We could, if we dared, tell something of the lives of other solitaires who are living in our midst, but to do so would be a breach of friendship, and we must leave it to our readers to discover their hiding-places for themselves!

It must be borne in mind that to some natures "material" solitude is an absolute necessity for their right development. They can no more live without it than without food and drink, and if they are deprived of this solitude their lives become spoilt, cramped, and distorted, and they never find their true vocation. They need the vast spaces of the "desert"—spiritual space—as much as physical. The "born solitary" is drawn to an eremitical life for various reasons, partly material, partly supernatural. He relates his peculiar limitations of character; he discovers that he needs to separate himself from his fellow-creatures, in order that his latent powers may have room for expansion and growth, that he may be more fitted to serve mankind generally.

"One of the most pernicious influences in the world for evil is the solitary who has missed his vocation," writes Mr. Montgomery Carmichael in *The Solitaires of the Sambuca* (p. 179). "There are conspicuous figures in religion, politics, art, literature, and philanthropy to-day who are leading lives of malignant activity far away from their natural element, which is solitude. . . . And now the world is in evil case,

and especially the Protestant world, for it has destroyed the monasteries and hermitages which might have sheltered in sanctity the men who are most dangerous to it."

Thus the natural craving for solitude may manifest itself in many strange ways among those whose lives are inspired by no religious motives. From time to time one reads in the newspapers of men who have disappeared from society and hidden themselves away in order to be free from any disturbance by their fellow-creatures. Some flee to the desert, some to remote islands, others live like anchorites in the midst of busy cities. There is the famous example of Thoreau in his sylvan retreat in Massachusetts. Many have followed his example. But not all of them have given us their experiences in book form.

Then there are those who sought solitude on the high seas, for nowhere perhaps can one find more perfect isolation than on the ocean. There is Captain Slocum, whose strange experiences are told in his enthralling book, *Sailing Alone Around the World*. There is Captain Voss, who made an even more astonishing solitary voyage round the world in his Indian canoe, *Tilikum*. There is the well-known Frenchman of our own day, Alain Gerbault, who never seems to be happy unless he is quite alone at sea in his tiny yacht *Firecrest*. They may seem eccentric, but they are only maritime hermits, who have managed to find their "solitary vocations."

—Indeed the call of "the lonely sea and the sky" is but the voice of Eternity, for the sea drowns out humanity and time—it has no sympathy with either; for it belongs to Eternity, and it sings its monotonous

song of Eternity for ever and ever. Nowhere better than on the sea one can learn what is meant by the "Loneliness of God."

In some articles which appeared recently in *Pax*, Miss F. M. Pohl discusses in detail various types of "modern solitaires," living in the world, unattached to any religious order. She points out that they vary very greatly—from the solitary who is more or less free and able to live alone, to the one who for all kinds of reasons must live in the family circle and mix much as usual with the world, with business and social matters. In essence, however, all are the same, whether they live alone or with one companion, whether they are married or single, in the family, or in domestic service, in the office, or in the home circle.

She describes various classes of "modern" hermits and anchorites—the man or woman who for some good reason has no vocation to the "religious life" of priest, monk, or nun; the "religious" who on account of ill-health is obliged to live outside the cloister; the invalid solitary whose nights and days are passed in weariness and pain, unrelieved by change or relaxation of any kind; the aged solitary, infirm and apparently useless, "though the angels may have other opinions on this point"; the solitary in a family who goes through life with a sense of being "out of it" in social matters, and of being a "misfit" all round. The loneliness of such souls may be acute if they have not learned to embrace it.

"Let us see how it comes to pass that perfection almost pre-supposes the solitary life. Our Lord was once accosted by a young man, comely and endowed with uprightness of intention beyond the ordinary.

We are told that Our Lord loved him, so that his innocence and purity must have been uncommon. The advice he received in answer to his earnest questions was "to sell all," give away the proceeds and follow the Master. Perfect and absolute denudation. *He was to stand alone.* Can we wonder that he thought the price too great, and went away in sorrow?

"But ever since that day men and women, and even children, have been asking the same intimate questions of Our Lord and themselves. The road of perfection is pointed out to them. Some follow it eagerly, keenly, without regret or backward glance; some stumble and are sorely tempted or retrace the steps made with such trouble . . . some turn away, not without sorrow, but they cannot face the lonely path of renunciation. The mistake they make in their blindness is that of confusing 'lonely' with 'alone.' 'Lonely' gives the impression of friendlessness, of forsaking, whereas 'alone' leaves room for visits from those dear to us. Sometimes when we call on a person we will say: 'Are you alone?'—meaning free and disengaged. If we asked: 'Are you lonely?' we should mean something quite different. When the soul is alone it is free and disengaged, so that God may come in and take complete possession. One can be both lonely and alone in a crowd. It is a common experience to realize in the midst of a crowd of people that we are unknown, unthought of, unremarked. This may give us a painful impression of loneliness, or we may be visited with a sudden grace from God and be united to Him in such a way that we are alone and the concourse of people is as nothing. The further one advances in spiritual ways the less lonely and the

more alone one becomes." (F. M. Pohl, "The House of the Spirit," art. in *Pax*, March 1931.)

"*Omnes sancti monachi et eremitæ, orate pro nobis*," "All ye holy monks and hermits, pray for us," is the cry that goes up, wherever and whenever the Litany of the Saints is chanted throughout the world. What do these words mean to us? Are they a mere lifeless formula, or does our memory recall the long procession of solitaires, hermits, and anchorites of all ages and all nations who have heard an Inner Voice bidding them rise up and go on the quest of solitude—to seek eternal realities in desert, cave, mountain, forest, sea-girt isle, or walled-up cell?

And what was their quest, the ideal they were pursuing? Surely the *unum necessarium* (the one thing needful), the part which Mary chose, which was not taken away from her.

For as Richard Rolle, the great English solitary, wrote: "The hermit-life therefore is great if it be greatly led . . . for to him who chooses the hermit-life for God's sake and leads it rightly, to him it shall be, not 'Woe,' but 'Winsome Virtue.'"

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